

Disability Management

As the largest university in the province, the University of Manitoba employs more than 6000 support and academic staff. The key role of this function is to provide an effective disability management program designed to minimize the personal and financial effects of disability.

Employee Wellness collaborates with injured/ill employees, physicians, healthcare providers, union representatives, university management, human resources and third party administrators to identify suitable return to work options. Of key importance is encouraging the safe return to productive employment by employees on sick leave and ensuring that applications for long-term disability benefits are made by employees who are disabled from performing their duties. This position also facilitates and coordinates graduated return to work programs for injured/ill employees and monitors progress during such critical periods.

Services include:

- Administration of sick leave and attendance management programs;
- Collaboratively developing return to work plans that may involve special accommodations;
- Work with employees who no longer qualify for Long Term Disability benefits – attempt to identify jobs and return to work opportunities;
- Develop and facilitate training programs related to disability management and return-to-work initiatives.

Program Goals

Effective reintegration of disabled employees minimizes the loss of expertise, resources and productive potential, and is the best strategy for maintaining the employee's potential and self-worth. The University's principal goal, therefore, is to provide meaningful, productive, sustainable employment, subject to certain overriding considerations, including:

- the paramount concern for the safety and wellbeing of the employee, and coworkers;
- the unique rights and responsibilities as set out under the Human Rights Code;
- any relevant collective agreement provisions;
- the University's right to manage their facilities and human resources as required to support their Mission and operational requirements.

Through a collaborative joint union/management approach to disability management, efforts are focused on minimizing the impact of illness and injury. To that end, the University, unions and employees all bear responsibility for ensuring the success of accommodation in the workplace.

Program Objectives

The primary objective is to minimize the human, economic, and social cost of disability to the employee, University, and society. The fundamental principle is simple:

“The sooner an injured/ill person recovers and returns to work, the more it will benefit the

individual, the employer, and society at large”.

In accordance with this fundamental principle, the University achieves effective disability management by:

- Assisting employees in maintaining their dignity and self-respect when adversely affected by injury or illness.
- Attending to the wellbeing of affected employees and by doing so reducing the stressors associated with disability.
- Coordinating early intervention activities to promote early and safe reintegration of disabled employees to the workplace, thereby minimizing the economic and emotional impact on the individual.
- Promoting good communication between all stakeholders, while respecting the need to protect confidential information.
- Reducing the direct and indirect costs associated with occupational and non-occupational injuries and illness.
- Acting in accordance with accepted standards pursuant to relevant current statutory regulations (Human Rights), University policies, and collective agreements.

Modified Duties/Alternate Work Arrangements

The University will undertake to find suitable employment, based on medical documentation, for any employee who becomes temporarily or permanently unable to perform his/her regular work due to injury or illness. While the onus lies with the University in identifying and facilitating reasonable accommodations, Unions and employees share responsibility in ensuring the success of return-to-work efforts. A collaborative approach is essential to the effectiveness of this multi-party process.

In making such accommodations, the University may consider any job, task, function or combination of function or tasks which are meaningful, productive and can be safely performed by an employee who suffers from diminished capacity, temporary or permanent, without increased risk of re-injury to self or others.

General Procedures

Case management activities are initiated by Employee Wellness upon notification of injury or illness in order to facilitate an early and safe return to work. An integral third party in the process is the employee's attending medical practitioner, who provides details of the individual's current physical capabilities and overall prognosis for functional recovery.

Employee Wellness may contact an employee to discuss treatment progress, fitness for work, and return to work options. A [Workplace Capabilities Form](#) may be requested at the onset of disability, and periodically thereafter, to assist in determining whether or not reasonable accommodations can be

facilitated. It is very important that the disabled employee keep in regular contact with his/her supervisor to keep the supervisor informed of progress made towards recovery and return to work.

Where an employee has been medically cleared to return to modified duties and/or hours, the following steps are generally taken:

1. Employee should obtain the written recommendations of his/her physician regarding a return to modified duties and/or hours. A [Workplace Capabilities Form](#) should be provided to the physician for completion.
2. Submit the medical document to Employee Wellness via email Kathy.niziol@umanitoba.ca or fax 204-474-7448 ASAP.
3. In most cases a RTW planning meeting will be required in order to develop a formal rehabilitation plan, which will include the employee, union representative, supervisor and Employee Wellness. Depending on the circumstances and subject to consultation with Employee Wellness, arrangements may be made to have the employee commence modified duties prior to the RTW planning meeting.

❖ [Flow Chart](#) illustrating RTW process

Employee Wellness, in concert with the supervisor and other team members, is responsible for determining reasonable job accommodation, including part-time or transitional employment and changes in task assignment, shift or equipment. The employee's active participation and cooperation in efforts to promote recovery are essential to their successful rehabilitation and will also aid toward continuing eligibility for disability benefits.

Guidelines For Modified Duty/Return To Work Program

The University is committed to providing a work environment that reasonably accommodates the special needs of its employees as a result of injury or illness. The University recognizes that when disability does arise, modified activities and early mobilization are key to quick recovery.

A key priority of this process is to attempt to return employees to their former job, or work that is consistent with that to which they were performing prior to the injury or illness. In many cases, this will be possible without any modification to the job or work environment. While injury or illness may result in the need for medical treatment or therapy, a full return to regular work activities is often possible.

In some cases, an employee may require temporary accommodations during the period of recuperation from injury or illness, until a return to regular work activities is possible. In these situations, the University explores reasonable transitional return-to-work opportunities, which may include workstation modifications and/or changes to the work activities. The following options will be considered:

1. Temporarily modifying the tasks of the employee's usual job, for example:
 - a) changing work organization demands or methods;
 - b) providing assistive devices;
 - c) physically changing the work area or equipment; and

- d) providing additional assistance.
2. Temporarily providing an alternate job, task, function or combination of functions or tasks.
3. Temporarily modifying the hours of work to allow for work hardening (i.e. graduated return-to-work).

Situations may arise where the employee will not be capable of returning to regular work activities due to the nature of the injury or illness. If it is unlikely that the employee will ever be capable of returning to their former position, consideration will be given to:

1. Permanently modifying the tasks required in the employee's usual job.
2. Permanently providing an alternate job.

Consideration will be given to alternate jobs provided they are meaningful, productive, reasonable and in accordance with operational requirements. It is recognized that additional training may be required with such job transfers. Generally, the accommodation options to be explored, be it temporary or permanent, are considered in the following order:

1. Return to existing job.
 - 1.1 Return to existing job with modifications.
2. Return to another job within existing classification.
 - 2.1 Return to another job with modifications within existing classification.
3. Return to another job outside of existing classification.
 - 3.1 Return to another job with modifications outside of existing classification.
4. Return to another job outside of existing bargaining unit.
 - 4.1 Return to another job with modifications outside of existing bargaining unit.

The extent of the accommodations required depends on the particular circumstances of each case. Every reasonable effort is to be made to minimize disruption in the workplace and interference with collective agreement rights resulting from accommodations.

Critical Elements to Successful Return-to-Work

The successful implementation of this process requires the following elements:

- All employees are made aware of the potential availability of modified duties/hours. If an injury or illness arises and it appears that the affected employee could take advantage of alternate or suitable duties, they must inform their medical practitioner.
- Managers must ensure that supervisors and all department personnel are aware of the availability of alternate or suitable duties. This includes temporary or permanent modifications to the work-site or work activities as well as training and development opportunities.

- Obtaining medical documentation concerning the employee=s functional capabilities is key to determining when efforts should be made to facilitate accommodation at the University. All employees must, when requested, have a [Workplace Capabilities Form](#) completed by their attending medical practitioner. This completed form must be returned to Employee Wellness as soon as reasonably possible, at which time suitable return-to-work options will be explored.
- Equal consideration and effort to accommodate employees must be made for both work-related and non-occupational injury/illness cases.
- Alternate or modified work must be based on the employee’s functional capabilities and any work restrictions or guidelines must be strictly adhered to.
- The work to be performed must be meaningful and productive for this program to have any credence.
- Once an employee has been accommodated, there will be ongoing review of the employee’s progress by Employee Wellness.