

Home Health Care-An Option for Injured Workers?

Although commonly thought of as “senior care,” home health care serves as a valuable tool in the work comp professional’s toolbox. Some work related injuries require special care that may present difficulties for the injured worker, such as arranging transportation or caring for extreme wounds. Allowing an injured worker to re-coop at home until strong enough for traditional occupational therapy can bring several benefits to both the worker and employer.

The popularity of home health care nearly doubled in the 90s, when the number of seniors using these services increased from 29.6 to 52.5 (per 1,000 persons) according to the [CDC](#). A study released in 1996 revealed an estimated 7.2 million Americans received at least one home visit that year. Michele Weatherford-Towle, regional marketing director for Total Home Health Services, clarifies home care is traditionally a “senior service” but can be a very effective benefit for injured workers. The service allows the worker to begin recovery immediately in their own home.

Home health care provides care in a person’s home beyond just personal and companion care. Home care agencies hire skilled care givers with varying specialties, which can include physical therapy, medication management, wound care, IV treatment, occupational therapy, speech therapy and on-site physician visits. This type of home care is appropriate for those suffering from chronic illness, recovering from an acute injury or illness that may need skilled care to stay at home. Workers’ Compensation law allows for some of these expenses to be reimbursed. For an injured worker who has difficulty leaving the house, home care can provide an environment to immediately begin recovery.

Beginning treatment in the home takes undue pressure and stress off the worker and their family. For a worker unable to walk or drive, the stress of venturing out for a doctor’s appointment and arranging transportation can be exhausting.

“The first goal of home care is getting the worker strong enough to return to outpatient therapy. Once we can get them off to therapy, we can strive to get them back to work,” Weatherford-Towle explains. In addition, the home care nurses teach and assist caregivers; educating them on things like wound care and therapy exercises. The caregivers learn how to provide better care on a consistent basis.

In most work comp cases, home care only lasts a few weeks until the worker is strong enough for outpatient therapy. The home care agency is held accountable and must show the injured worker is making progress. Jessica Amos, work comp administrator for ArcelorMittal occasionally uses a home health care agency for critical injuries. For injuries like wound care, she recommends home care because it provides a nurse to visit the home and care for the worker. It may eliminate the need for a hospital stay or arranging transportation for the worker.

There is much research to be done on the overall impact home health care has on work comp claims. Weatherford-Towle confidently touts employers will see a quicker recovery and better patient outcome. The injured worker is happier to be at home for a few weeks actively recovering and feels more independence in the rehab experience, leading to a more confident recovery. Amos would agree. She can’t provide evidence of a speedier recovery, but she can for a more confident recovery. “Home care makes our patients feel better. Their spouse even feels better. The overall results are improved because they feel they’re getting the care they need,” Amos explains.

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For now, work comp professionals can be mindful of a tool that may be commonly overlooked. Home health care may provide more positive outcomes for injured workers by taking the stress off both the worker and their family. Home care provides attentive care right at home where the worker feels most comfortable. While there is a lack of evidence for the exact impact home care has on recovery time, there is agreement that it provides better results for the worker. This is certainly a tool for case managers to consider and discuss with the injured worker and healthcare team.

“It’s important for case managers to add home health care to their work comp toolbox. It can be an integral part of the return to work process,” Weatherford-Towle urges, “We just need to help everyone be aware.”

References

Interview

Michele Weatherford-Towle, regional marketing director for Total Home Health Services

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Jessica Amos, work comp administrator for, ArcelorMittal

CDC report

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/misc/healthcare.pdf>