

7 PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL RETURN TO WORK

STRATEGIES FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS IN SINGAPORE



Work is an important role for many of us. When one suffers an injury or a medical condition and is unable to return to work (RTW), this may affect one's health and financial situation. At the same time, workforce manpower and productivity may be compromised at the workplace.

There is increasing evidence that work is good for an injured worker's health and well-being. Healthcare professionals can facilitate and support the injured/ill workers to RTW as soon as it is medically safe to do so, to reap the health benefits of work. This guide is based on the "Seven principles of Successful Return to Work" developed by the Institute for Work & Health (IWH)(2007, rev 2014). These principles have been found to have positive impact on duration and costs of work disability.

Principle 1: The employer makes early contact with the injured/ill worker.

Principle 2: Someone has the responsibility to coordinate RTW.

Principle 3: Employers and health care professionals communicate with each other about the workplace demands, with the worker's consent.

Principle 4: Employer offers modified work (or work accommodation) to facilitate early RTW.

Principle 5: RTW plan supports the returning worker without disadvantaging co-workers.

Principle 6: Supervisors are trained in work disability prevention and RTW planning.

Principle 7: The workplace has a strong commitment to health and safety in the workplace.

What healthcare professionals can do to facilitate the 7 principles:

- ▶ Talk about RTW with the injured/ill worker early in the recovery process. Emphasise to worker the health benefits of work and that RTW is an important part of recovery.
- ▶ Communicate with other healthcare professionals, worker and employer on worker's fitness to RTW. Involve an Occupational Therapist in the team to facilitate communication with the employer and follow up with RTW issues and concerns.
- ▶ Focus on what the worker can do, rather than what they cannot do. The worker does not need to be 100% well to RTW as long as their functional ability matches the job demands.
- ▶ Establish timeline to set an expectation of recovery time and date to RTW for worker. This can help the injured/ill worker work towards the RTW goal.

