RETURN TO WORK INFORMATION FOR SUPERVISORS

Returning to work following an absence can often be the most critical component of your employee’s recovery. A timely and safe return to work can help ill or injured staff and faculty recover more quickly.

This guide outlines steps you may take to help make your employee’s return to work smooth and successful. It provides information on actions you may want to consider before they return to work, on their first day back and throughout their return to work period. Participating in the Return to Work Program will not only benefit your employee’s health but will also boost morale and productivity in your department.

Key concepts to help you successfully manage your return to work

Work is a key part of recovery. Gradually incorporating work demands into your employee’s recovery may help to improve their chances of staying healthy. Work may benefit their overall health by providing structure and routine, social interaction, physical and mental stimulation and a sense of accomplishment.

Returning to work may require an adjustment period. Your employee may not be able to fully perform the physical and mental demands of their job in the same way as prior to the onset of your condition. Their attending physician may recommend a temporary accommodation to help your employee gradually reintegrate into the hours and duties required for their job. The Wellness & Recovery (W&R) office is keen to work with you, your employee and their physician to find a suitable accommodation while they are still recovering from their injury or illness.

Stay connected and keep lines of communication open
To help make your employee’s return to work successful, it is important that you stay connected with them while they are off on sick leave. Talk to him/her about how you can support and facilitate their return to work. Arrange for regular Return to Work meetings and keep an open mind when addressing your employee’s worries or concerns about returning to work, and what you can do to prepare and what you will need to assist their transition back to the workplace.

What can you do to assist your employee with their return to work after an injury or illness?

1. Request that your employee provide you or the Wellness & Recovery office with medical clearance to return to work in advance of their return to work date. This will allow you to make any arrangements necessary to facilitate their return to work. It may include scheduling of other staff, procurement of special equipment etc.

2. The medical clearance to return to work must clearly outline any limitations and/or restrictions of the duties and/or hours that your employee will require to return to full time hours. The Attending Physician Statement (APS) is a useful tool for your employee’s physician to use to provide all the necessary information. You may access a copy of the form here.

3. Attend regular Return to Work meetings with your employee and the W&R consultant. Your employee may also request the presence of their representative The purpose of these meetings is to:
   • review medical information and the return to work plan and to understand how you will evaluate success and address issues
   • discuss things like workload, job duties and performance to make sure your expectations and that of your employee align
   • address problems early so they don’t negatively impact your employee’s recovery
   • identify if there are workplace factors causing problems and to proactively address these with your employee and come up with solutions together
   • discuss any extra training or reintegration time/resources that you may be able to offer within
reason

- encourage your employee to get back into a regular work routine
- review your employee’s return to work plan on a regular basis. A gradual return to work is intended to be temporary.

TIPS

- It is important that you address problems early. If there are workplace factors that may affect or exacerbate your employee’s condition, talk to the W&R consultant and develop strategies to deal with these.
- Remind your employee to advise their attending physician that the University has a Return to Work Program and that in most cases modified duties/hours are available. Talk to the W&R consultant to help you draft an Offer of Modified Duties letter to your employee.

Does your employee require a temporary workplace accommodation?
The purpose of workplace accommodations is to help remove return to work barriers thus allowing your employee to return to work as soon as possible. Temporary accommodations are assessed on a case-by-case basis supported by satisfactory medical information. Accommodation examples may include the following:

- Hours: graduated return to work; flex time to attend appointments; balance work/life; non-standard breaks during the work day.
- Duties: modification of work tasks; re-assignment of tasks during the return to work; allowing extra time to complete tasks.
- Modification of work environment: lighting; noise or other distractions, workstation, equipment etc.

What is your role as a manager/supervisor?
You play a critical role in your employee’s return to work. Maintain an open approach.

- Sometimes your employee may not feel comfortable disclosing the details of their health problem. Find a balance between their privacy and trying to understand their situation.
- You are entitled to know how your employee’s medical condition affects their ability to work, including their prognosis to return to work which will allow you to make appropriate operational decisions. Your employee is entitled to keep their specific diagnosis and/or treatment confidential.

What should you tell my employee’s co-workers?
Details of your employee’s absence are private and confidential. Only your employee can determine whether or not they wish to share this information, and with whom. If you are unsure of the best approach, talk to the W&R consultant. Encourage your employee to provide some communication that you can share with their team to prevent gossip or misinformation.

Is my employee’s medical information confidential?
Your employee may choose not to share medical information such as diagnosis and treatment with you. Your employee has the option of providing their medical information directly to the W&R team. The W&R consultant will then share with you the doctor’s feedback on limitations and restrictions, prognosis for recovery, prognosis for return to work and specific needs for work accommodation.

Where can I go if I need more support?
- Wellness & Recovery Office
  Ph: 778.782.6698
  Confidential Fax: 778.782.6873
  Email: rtw_dm@sfu.ca
- Employee and Family Assistance Program (Human Solutions)
  Ph: 1.800.663.1142
  Web: http://www.humansolutions.ca

Some helpful online resources:

www.heretohelp.bc.ca
(BC resource for tools, tips and information on mental health issues and wellness)

http://www.iwh.on.ca
(Institute for Health and Work – a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting, protecting and improving the health of workers)

http://www.cmha.bc.ca
(information and resources on mental health issues)

https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/
(resources for individuals and supervisors on mental health in workplaces)