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Return to Work

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Boeing's SAW/RTW Program
Vendor Integration for Early Intervention
RTW Best Practices: Part II



Boeing Provides Employees

A Safe Landing

with a First-Class
Return to Work Program

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SVP Disability and Absence Management, Sedgwick

Boeing has a long tradition of aerospace leadership and innovation in commercial and military aviation. Founded by William Boeing in 1916, today Boeing employs over 169,000 workers in the United States and 65 countries.

Boeing’s leadership and innovation has also been reflected in the development of its Stay at Work/Return to Work program (SAW/RTW) for employees. The overarching premise of the program is taking care of their employees and ensuring they receive best-in-class care and service. The Boeing commitment to a “service culture,” as practiced with external customers, is also the standard set for servicing internal employee customers.

Boeing’s corporate core values include a strong emphasis on the health, safety, and well-being of all employees, as well as adhering to the important corporate conduct principles of integrity, quality, trust, and respect. The vision for the company’s Stay at Work/Return to Work (SAW/RTW) program is anchored in these values. The program emphasizes employee health and well-being and strives to ensure the highest quality employee experience when an actual disability occurs. An essential principle of the program is establishing a caring and compassionate approach that addresses both the employee’s and the employer’s needs, regardless of the underlying reason for an employee’s time away from work.

Mike Tarling, Assistant Treasurer, Risk Management & Insurance, and Scott Buchanan, Director, Benefits Services, manage the workers’ compensation program, leading a team of professionals who coordinate with the many stakeholders in the Boeing SAW/RTW program. Boeing and Sedgwick became partners in 2010, continuing the tradition of RTW



innovation. Today 160 Sedgwick clinical and claims personnel from across the country are dedicated to carrying out the Boeing workers' compensation claims management program.

Boeing's program has been highly successful in addressing workforce health and productivity. Five program components will be highlighted here: Boeing Health Services, the Industrial Athlete, Medical Provider Facility Tours, Dedicated Vocational Counselors and Lean/Six Sigma initiatives for continuous process improvement.

Boeing Health Services

Boeing Health Services has developed a comprehensive care system to support and facilitate SAW/RTW.

In the early years, Boeing's onsite clinics focused on the need for immediate treatment and follow-up for on-the-job injuries. Over time, increasing use of the clinics by employees led to program expansion. There are now 14 on-site clinics around the country, which record over 92,000 visits annually. This includes services rendered for some non-occupational conditions such as colds and minor personal injuries.

"We had no idea how flexible Boeing could be with accommodating temporary restrictions for work injuries."

"Employees benefit from a team of experts including wellness coaches, exercise physiologists, athletic trainers, massage therapists, medical assistants, registered nurses, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, physicians, Employee Assistance Program counselors, physical therapists, vocational counselors, disability management specialists, ergonomists, and workers' compensation specialists, all dedicated to employee health, safety and well-being."
Laura Cain, MD, Associate Medical Director, Boeing

Boeing believes that these onsite services differentiate it as a premier employer, committed to the health and well-being of its employees. Having nearby clinical resources readily available for employee treatment or questions improves the ability of employees to stay engaged in managing their own health. Ultimately, this helps to reduce unnecessary absence from work and improves quality of life for pursuit of personal activities.

The Industrial Athlete

The Industrial Athlete is another innovative component of Boeing's SAW/RTW. The program has been in operation for nearly 10 years, with participation by almost 33,000 employees to date. The program's mission is to give Boeing employees the resilience to engage in a lifetime of physically demanding work and play.

Under Boeing's Health Services leadership, the Industrial Athlete program brings together both internal and external specialty resources to create a continuum of Boeing-defined services in prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. The service options are designed

Anonymous Medical Provider

to integrate into existing programs at individual Boeing locations. Services are open to employees regardless of whether a work injury has occurred or not, and participation is voluntary.

Symptom Intervention is designed to identify as early as possible symptoms of mild discomfort that a worker may feel while performing job tasks: 6,500 people annually participate in this program and over 95% remain symptom-free after symptom intervention.

Employees are encouraged to act quickly when discomfort occurs. The

Industrial Athlete team is located near the production worksite. When the employee contacts a team member, follow-up often includes a worksite assessment (15 to 30 minutes) by onsite athletic trainers and/or therapists. This onsite observation can quickly identify if better body mechanics, personal protective equipment, or work-site adjustments may be needed. Other common actions to address discomfort include first aid, deep tissue massage, or a personalized plan of stretching and conditioning. With intervention customized to the person and the job, the employee's good health can be maintained, preventing further strain or injury.

Acute Physical Therapy is another intervention tool of the Industrial Athlete program. This occurs onsite in some locations and through local providers in others. Participants will either proceed back to work or progress into work conditioning/work hardening, depending on their functional abilities and the job requirements.

Work Conditioning services include physical conditioning to ensure the right capability and strength for job performance. There are 3,000 program participants annually. Participants report increased strength and flexibility as a result of the job conditioning; up to 90% report making healthy changes to work and exercise habits that were lasting. Studies have shown the work conditioning program reduces the likelihood of injury by as much as 30%.

Work Hardening services are used if an injury has already occurred. Under supervision by athletic trainers and/or therapists, the employee participates in a personalized program of education on body mechanics, work methods, and how to best prevent re-injury. An important component is the Progressive Work Simulation structured, supervised plan of exercise and tasks to increase stamina and work capabilities over time. This personalized recovery plan creates an effective path from lost

time to temporary modified duty and then on to return to full job duties. There have been over 750 participants to date. In 2014, 85% of participants returned to work at their pre-injury job, with 100% RTW overall.

Medical Outreach: Facility Tours

In 2012, Boeing and its third-party administrator (TPA) claims team noted an increase in employee lost workdays. The problem seemed to be in RTW, just before an employee was released to modified duty. The team felt the lag time was related to the medical provider's lack of timely, reliable information about available modified duty. Boeing felt that its outreach program to local treating providers needed to be strengthened.

As a first step, the Boeing team identified the most frequently used medical providers and emergency departments. Next, team members visited provider locations to discuss Boeing's approach to employee health and well-being and to show a Boeing video detailing the RTW program. However, most interaction was with office staff, not directly with the providers—those who most impact the employee RTW.

The team decided that if they could get the treating providers into the Boeing plant for a first-hand look at the work environment and the modified duty program, SAW/RTW could be more successful.

Medical provider tours began in 2013 at the Everett, Washington plant. The quarterly four-hour tour offers the opportunity for providers who treat Boeing employees to see the work environment, job tasks, and modified duty options, and to discuss the Boeing RTW program overall. The tour also visits onsite health services (e.g., physical therapy, work conditioning, and work hardening) and describes the relationship between the TPA, different Boeing departments, and the provider.

No incentives are needed to interest providers in the tour. The TPA identi-

fies local providers that are most active in serving Boeing employees and reaches out with a phone invitation. After providers express an interest, the TPA provides their contact information to Boeing, and Boeing emails them a tour invitation.

This Boeing initiative is about communicating to medical providers that Boeing has a culture in which RTW and patient care are the focus. The feedback from provider tours has consistently been positive, reflecting one provider's observation that "we had no idea how flexible Boeing could be with accommodating temporary restrictions for work injuries." With this success, there are now tours at most of Boeing's Puget Sound locations, with plans to add similar tours at other facilities across the country.

"The tour allows the opportunity to see common tasks, such as bucking and riveting. By better understanding the nature of my patients' jobs, the employer's onsite programs and services, I have been able to more effectively coordinate injury management rehabilitation efforts on my patients' behalf."

Dr. Dianna Chamblin, Everett Clinic

Dedicated Vocational Counselors

Vocational specialists are an important resource for more complex RTW situations. The specialist provides the employee and the supervisor with the extra support needed to identify and understand the best options for a successful RTW.

In 2011, the Boeing workers' compensation team determined that the approach of referring injured workers to a wide variety of vocational firms was not providing a consistent experience for Boeing employees. As a result, Boeing moved to a dedicated program with one vendor in order to ensure consistency and quality. Today, one service provider with six dedicated certified vocational counselors works exclusively with Boeing employees.

This new approach has surpassed expectations. Employees needing RTW services now move more quickly through the vocational evaluation, with process time being reduced by up to 20%. The use of a dedicated vocational team leads to process efficiencies making the experience less about administrative activities, and putting the focus on the employee's needs for a successful and safe RTW.

"As dedicated vocational counselors working solely on Return to Work at Boeing, we have been able to assemble and incorporate expert knowledge of the work and the culture."

Julie Busch, MS, CDMS, VP,
Strategic Consulting Services

LEAN/Six Sigma and Continuous Process Improvement

Keeping employees healthy, productive, and at work can often be a complex process. An organization as large and diverse as Boeing has many moving parts that must come together for an efficient and consistent process responsive to employee needs. Boeing recognized that getting the process "right" was key to success across all the various SAW/RTW program components.

In 2012, Boeing and the TPA claims team combined forces in a LEAN/Six Sigma process improvement initiative. Over three months, the project team did a deep dive to analyze and systematically address workers' compensation administrative and RTW processes and pain points. Both short-term and long-term (i.e., technology-driven) action items were identified for the TPA and for Boeing. Numerous "quick hits" resulted in improved response times and implementation of ongoing process metrics; other actions included realignment of tasks to optimize team skills and technology. Importantly, program leaders for Boeing and the TPA worked together to ensure the right support for the changes needed in both organizations.

The shared culture of this continu-

ous process improvement technique will continue to be a valuable tool as Boeing's business and program needs grow and change.

Conclusion

Boeing's SAW/RTW program establishes a caring and compassionate approach, addressing both employee and employer needs. This solid vision for enhancing employee health and well-being, led by innovative and talented stakeholders and combined with a mindset for continuous process improvement, has shaped Boeing's SAW/RTW program and laid the foundation for its continued success in the future. ●