

School: ATEC – Medical Management
Course: Identifying and Addressing Non-Physical Barriers with Work Conditioning and Functional Capacity Testing
Faculty: Rob Townsend, Clinical Consultant, Bardavon Health Innovations

Summary

In the course titled "Identifying and Addressing Non-Physical Barriers with Work Conditioning and Functional Capacity Testing," Rob Townsend of Bardavon Health Innovations delves into the complexities of managing non-physical barriers in the rehabilitation of injured workers. With over 25 years of experience in the field of work injury, Townsend shares insights into how these barriers can impact recovery and return to work, emphasizing the importance of both physical and psychological components in the rehabilitation process.

Townsend begins by differentiating between work conditioning and work hardening. Work conditioning focuses on physical conditioning to prepare injured workers for return to their job demands, while work hardening incorporates a multidisciplinary approach, including psychological and vocational elements. He stresses the importance of recognizing non-physical barriers such as psychological factors, fear of re-injury, and social situations that can significantly affect an injured worker's recovery process.

A key part of the lecture is understanding the role of Functional Capacity Evaluations (FCEs) in the rehabilitation process. Townsend explains that FCEs provide a comprehensive assessment of an individual's physical capabilities, which helps in determining their readiness for return to work. He highlights that the timing of FCEs is crucial, as conducting them too soon, before adequate conditioning, can result in lower function levels and may not accurately reflect the worker's capabilities.

Townsend emphasizes the importance of accurate job descriptions in the rehabilitation process. He explains that without detailed job descriptions, it becomes challenging to design effective work conditioning programs and FCEs. Accurate job descriptions help tailor rehabilitation activities to the specific requirements of the injured worker's job, ensuring that the rehabilitation process is both relevant and effective.

The lecture also covers the optimal script lengths and treatment frequencies for work conditioning. Townsend advocates for more frequent and longer sessions than typical physical therapy, ideally involving 10-20 hours per week. This increased intensity helps better prepare the injured worker for the physical demands of their job and addresses non-physical barriers by building confidence and reducing anxiety related to return to work.

Townsend discusses the importance of addressing non-physical barriers directly. He suggests that clinicians should use open-ended questions and structured questionnaires to identify issues such as psychological distress, fear of re-injury, and social or financial concerns. Building rapport and trust with the patient is crucial for effective rehabilitation, as it encourages open communication and helps clinicians address both physical and non-physical barriers.

In summary, Townsend's course provides a comprehensive overview of the role of work conditioning and FCEs in addressing non-physical barriers in the rehabilitation of injured workers. He emphasizes the need for a holistic approach that considers both physical and psychological components, the importance of accurate job descriptions, and the benefits of frequent and intensive work conditioning sessions. By addressing these factors, clinicians can better support injured workers in their recovery process and facilitate a successful return to work.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the distinctions between work conditioning and work hardening, including their purposes and methodologies.
2. Identify the purpose and utilization of a work conditioning program as a treatment modality and how it differs from traditional physical and occupational therapy.
3. Explore the optimal script lengths, treatment durations, and frequencies for effective work conditioning.
4. Comprehend the essential components and objectives of Functional Capacity Evaluations (FCEs).
5. Recognize the optimal timing for FCEs and how to use FCE data to move claims forward towards closure or return to work.

Primary Takeaways

1. Work conditioning and work hardening serve distinct roles, with the former focusing on physical conditioning and the latter involving a multidisciplinary approach including psychological and vocational elements.
2. Effective work conditioning requires more frequent and longer sessions than typical physical therapy, ideally 10-20 hours per week.
3. Non-physical barriers, such as psychological factors and fear of re-injury, significantly impact the rehabilitation process and must be addressed for successful return to work.

4. Functional Capacity Evaluations provide a comprehensive assessment of an individual's physical capabilities, helping to determine their readiness for return to work and potential need for continued care.
5. Accurate job descriptions and understanding of job demands are crucial for effective work conditioning and FCEs, ensuring that rehabilitation is tailored to the specific requirements of the injured worker's job.

Course Outline

- 1) Introduction to Work Conditioning and Functional Capacity Evaluations
 - a) Overview and Importance
 - i) Definition and Purpose of Work Conditioning
 - ii) Definition and Purpose of Functional Capacity Evaluations (FCEs)
 - b) Background and Experience of Instructor
 - i) Instructor's Clinical Experience
 - ii) Research on Sincerity of Effort
- 2) Differences Between Work Conditioning and Work Hardening
 - a) Work Conditioning
 - i) Focus on Physical Conditioning
 - ii) Typical Structure and Duration
 - b) Work Hardening
 - i) Multidisciplinary Approach
 - ii) Inclusion of Psychological and Vocational Elements
- 3) Utilization and Benefits of Work Conditioning
 - a) Treatment Modality
 - i) Differences from Traditional PT and OT
 - ii) Importance of Frequency and Duration of Sessions
 - b) Addressing Non-Physical Barriers
 - i) Psychological Factors
 - ii) Fear of Re-Injury
 - iii) Importance of Building Trust and Rapport
- 4) Essential Components and Purpose of FCEs
 - a) Comprehensive Physical Assessment
 - i) Head-to-Toe Evaluation
 - ii) Identifying Physical Demand Levels
 - b) Utilization of FCE Data
 - i) Determining Employability

- ii) Identifying Restrictions and Need for Continued Care
- 5) Optimal Timing and Implementation of Work Conditioning and FCEs
- a) Timing for Work Conditioning
 - i) Post-Acute Phase of Tissue Healing
 - ii) Integrating Whole-Body Strengthening
 - b) Timing for FCEs
 - i) After Completion of Rehabilitative Care
 - ii) Importance of Conditioning Before Testing
- 6) Practical Considerations and Case Studies
- a) Case Examples
 - i) Heavy Job Demands
 - ii) Public Safety and Lack of Modified Duty Options
 - b) Role of Accurate Job Descriptions
 - i) Importance of Detailed Job Analyses
 - ii) Challenges with Inaccurate Descriptions

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