

School: Medical Management
Course: The Foundational Importance of a Biopsychosocial Approach
Faculty: Dr. Les Kertay, Senior VP for Behavioral Health, Axiom Medical

Summary

The course "The Foundational Importance of a Biopsychosocial Approach," taught by Dr. Les Kertay, delves into the necessity of integrating biological, psychological, and social factors in the management of work-related injuries within the workers' compensation system. Dr. Kertay, a clinical psychologist with over 45 years of experience, aims to highlight the limitations of the traditional biomedical model and promote a more holistic biopsychosocial approach.

Introduction to the Biopsychosocial Model: Dr. Kertay begins by defining the biopsychosocial model and explaining its relevance in workers' compensation. Unlike the linear and cause-specific biomedical model, the biopsychosocial model considers the complex interplay of various factors that influence recovery. For instance, two workers with similar physical injuries might have different outcomes based on their psychological responses and social contexts. This approach underscores the need to look beyond physical symptoms to understand the broader context affecting an injured worker's recovery.

Psychological and Psychosocial Factors: A key distinction made in the course is between psychological/psychiatric diagnoses and psychosocial barriers to recovery. While psychological diagnoses such as major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder require specific treatments, psychosocial barriers like fear avoidance, low job satisfaction, and perceived lack of workplace support can significantly delay recovery and are not necessarily conditions requiring medical treatment. Addressing these barriers involves effective communication and understanding the injured worker's perspectives and concerns.

Evaluating and Managing Risks: Dr. Kertay discusses various risk factors for delayed and failed recovery. Some of these factors are non-modifiable, such as age and gender, while others are modifiable, like perceived injustice and pain avoidance behaviors. For example, workers who feel their injury was caused by negligence on the part of their employer or those who catastrophize their situation are more likely to experience prolonged recovery periods. Early identification and intervention are crucial in managing these risks and preventing long-term disability.

Importance of Effective Communication: Communication plays a vital role in the biopsychosocial approach. Dr. Kertay emphasizes the need for healthcare providers to

build trust with injured workers through honest and empathetic interactions. Effective communication involves listening to the worker's concerns, providing clear information about their condition and treatment plan, and setting realistic expectations for recovery. This approach helps in addressing the psychosocial factors that often impede recovery.

Coordinating Care: Coordinating care among various stakeholders is essential for effective management of work-related injuries. Dr. Kertay highlights the role of case managers and adjusters in facilitating communication between the injured worker, healthcare providers, and employers. This coordination ensures that all parties are aligned in their efforts to support the worker's recovery and return to work. He also stresses the importance of functional recovery over mere symptom management, advocating for treatment plans that focus on restoring the worker's ability to perform their job.

Early Intervention and Return to Work: Early intervention is a cornerstone of the biopsychosocial approach. Dr. Kertay presents evidence showing that the longer a person is out of work, the less likely they are to return. Therefore, addressing psychosocial barriers and promoting early return to work are crucial. He discusses the concept of psychological first aid, which involves providing immediate support and reassurance to injured workers, helping them feel safe, and encouraging self-care practices.

Conclusion: Dr. Kertay concludes by reiterating the importance of adopting a biopsychosocial approach in workers' compensation. He encourages claims professionals to understand the individual behind the injury and to use their influence to address the broader factors affecting recovery. By integrating this holistic approach, healthcare providers and claims professionals can significantly improve outcomes for injured workers, facilitating their return to meaningful and productive work.

Learning Objectives

1. Understanding the Biopsychosocial Model: Learn what the biopsychosocial model entails and why it is critical in the context of workers' compensation.
2. Differentiating Between Diagnoses and Barriers: Distinguish between psychological/psychiatric diagnoses and psychosocial barriers to recovery and return to work.
3. Evaluating Risks: Gain skills in evaluating risks for delayed and failed recovery using biopsychosocial factors.
4. Coordinating Care: Develop strategies for coordinating care and managing difficult communications with injured workers.
5. Promoting Functional Recovery: Understand the importance of functional recovery over mere symptom management and how to promote it effectively.

Primary Takeaways

1. Complexity of Recovery: Recovery from work-related injuries is influenced by a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors.
2. Importance of Early Intervention: Early identification and intervention in cases of psychosocial barriers can prevent long-term disability.
3. Role of Communication: Effective communication with injured workers is crucial in building trust and facilitating recovery.
4. Impact of Perceived Injustice: Perceived injustice and catastrophic thinking significantly affect recovery outcomes.
5. Multidisciplinary Approach: A multidisciplinary approach involving various stakeholders improves the chances of successful recovery and return to work.

Course Outline

- 1) Introduction to the Biopsychosocial Approach
 - a) Overview of the Course Objectives
 - b) Definition and Significance of the Biopsychosocial Model
 - c) Differences from the Biomedical Model
- 2) Psychological and Psychosocial Factors
 - a) Psychological vs. Psychiatric Diagnoses
 - i) Definitions and Examples
 - ii) Impact on Recovery
 - b) Psychosocial Barriers
 - i) Fear Avoidance and Low Job Satisfaction
 - ii) Financial Issues and Workplace Support
- 3) Evaluating and Managing Risks
 - a) Identifying Red Flags
 - i) Previous Claims and Medical History
 - ii) Comorbidities and Coping Mechanisms
 - b) Risk Assessment Tools
 - i) Screening for Depression and Anxiety
 - ii) Evaluating Resilience and Perceived Injustice
- 4) Communication and Coordination
 - a) Building Trust with Injured Workers
 - i) Clear and Empathetic Communication
 - ii) Addressing Emotional and Psychological Needs
 - b) Coordinating Care

- i) Role of Case Managers and Adjusters
 - ii) Multidisciplinary Teams and Approaches
- 5) Promoting Functional Recovery
- a) Importance of Functional Goals
 - i) Focusing on Abilities Rather than Limitations
 - ii) Encouraging Activity and Movement
 - b) Addressing Pain and Psychosocial Factors
 - i) Pain Management Strategies
 - ii) Coping Mechanisms and Psychological Support
- 6) Conclusion
- a) Recap of Key Points
 - b) Practical Applications in Workers' Compensation

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