

# at work

Information on workplace research from the **Institute for Work & Health**

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New study launched on different patterns of treatment

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Institute follows up Future Search with RSI benchmarking study

### For Policy

Do compensation systems affect workplace safety?; Institute joins CPRN at employment relationships meeting.

### For Researchers

Working paper on Toronto Star project available; Special report on Balanced Scorecard project published.

## This Issue's Supplement

Soft-tissue injuries are not only the most common of workplace injuries, but also the most costly. The return-to-work process for workers with soft-tissue injuries is a major theme of the Institute's work. This issue of *Infocus* examines the Work-Ready project, designed to educate clinicians and other parties on best practices for treating injured workers throughout their return to work.

To be notified by e-mail when a new issue of *At Work* is published and available on our web site, send your e-mail address to [atwork@iwh.on.ca](mailto:atwork@iwh.on.ca).



**Research Excellence  
Advancing Employee Health**

## Physicians guide for injury and return to work now online

**A** new guide to assist physicians, residents and other health professionals in managing the return-to-work process for their patients is now available online.

The guide, *Injury/Illness and Return to Work/Function: A Practical Guide for Physicians*, is the result of work by the Physician Education Project in Workplace Health (PEPWH). This guide is available at the Workplace Safety & Insurance Board of Ontario (WSIB) Web site at <http://wsib.on.ca>.

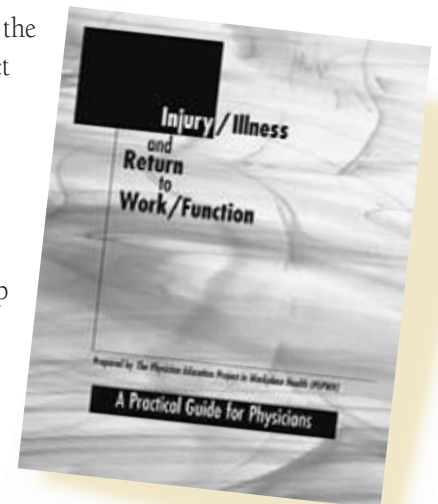
The formation of PEPWH was an initiative of the Institute for Work & Health in partnership with the Ontario Medical Association's (OMA) Section on Occupational and Environmental Medicine. The project receives funding from the WSIB and comprises physicians and a range of stakeholders involved in return-to-work issues.

The guide emphasizes an active role for physicians as advocates, communicators, resource managers, and facilitators in the return-to-work process for their patients. It also provides useful information for physicians who handle injured or ill patients, particularly as a result of a workplace accident. The guide outlines the factors that influence return to work, including workplace conditions, access to services such as rehabilitation and retraining opportunities, and socioeconomic conditions. (For more information see *At Work*, May 2000).

A number of practical resources are provided in this package, including information on income support from various public (provincial and federal) and private insurance plans available to those who are unable to work because of illness or injury. In addition, a WSIB appendix includes forms that physicians may be required to complete, as well as information on contacting WSIB staff.

The guide also includes material from Work-Ready — a project co-sponsored by the Institute, HEALNet (Health Evidence Application and Linkage Network), and the National Institute of Disability Management and Research. The Participant's booklet summarizes the findings of the literature review and interviews conducted by the Work-Ready researchers.

(To be continued on page 3 ➔)



The Institute for Work & Health is a knowledge-based change organization that strives to research and promote: new ways to prevent workplace disability, improved treatment, and optimal recovery and safe return-to-work.

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# Clinical

## WHO IS TREATING INJURED WORKERS?

**D**oes an injured worker's choice of health care provider affect their treatment? Do workers who see a physician have a different pattern of health care use than workers who see a physiotherapist? These are some of the questions being investigated as part of a new project led by Jennifer Payne, a scientist at the Institute for Work & Health. "It will be interesting to know whether two workers with the same type of injury use health services differently, and whether this depends on who their main health care provider is," says Payne.

The majority of claims for work-related injuries are soft-tissue injuries, and there is conflicting evidence on how to effectively treat these workers in order to get them back to work safely and quickly. Before this can be answered researchers need to understand the variation in how injured workers use health services.

Payne's study will combine information reported by workers with either back or upper/lower extremity injuries, with information on their use of health care services. Data on health care services were obtained from Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) records and data on physician visits were obtained from the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) records. Health care utilization will be measured by the number of visits they make to their providers, and whether they had lab tests or X-rays performed. This information will be compared for workers with the same site and severity of injury.

"This kind of information is important if we are to understand whether injured workers are being cared for in different ways. This information can eventually be used to improve care for injured workers" says Payne. Results of this study are expected in fall 2001. 🏠

*For more information on this project, contact Rhoda Reardon, Research Transfer Associate at the Institute. She may be reached by e-mail: rreardon@iwh.on.ca, or by phone: 416.927.2027 Ext. 2174.*

## WHAT'S ON THE WEB

### Earlybird Registration Intent Form on WorkCongress5 Web site

The deadline for the earlybird registration for the Congress, to be held in Australia from March 18-21, 2001, is October 31, 2000. Details about how to register are on the WorkCongress5 Web site at [www.workcongress5.org](http://www.workcongress5.org) and click on "Registration".

The 5<sup>th</sup> international congress' major focus is on "re-assessing structures" which compares the range of approaches around the world in work injuries, prevention, rehabilitation and compensation. The list of speakers include international experts in public policy, workplace legislation, management practices, health and safety protection, rehabilitation and compensation.

### Web User Survey

It's not too late to tell us what you think about the Institute's Web site. A user survey has been placed on our home page and you are encouraged to fill it out on-line.

With your feedback, comments and suggestions, we hope to build and develop content to better reflect what you are interested in seeing when you visit our site.

Simply go to <http://www.iwh.on.ca> and click on the "Web User Survey" line in our Spotlight section.

If you have any comments or questions about the survey or about the Web site, contact Katherine Lukewich, Web Coordinator, at [klukewich@iwh.on.ca](mailto:klukewich@iwh.on.ca).

### E-version of At Work Available on Web site

The full text of both our newsletter *At Work* and its supplement *Infocus* are available on the site. A link to our newsletters is on our home page. These files are available in Adobe's Portable Document Format (PDF).

If you wish to receive an e-mail notification rather than a hard copy of the newsletter, please send an e-mail to the editor at [atwork@iwh.on.ca](mailto:atwork@iwh.on.ca).





# Policy Makers

## How do Workers' Compensation System Design Features Affect Stakeholder Behaviour?

Varying some features of workers' compensation systems may affect health and safety practices in the workplace. A project at the Institute is reviewing literature that looks at how varying the design features of workers' compensation systems might influence the behaviour of employers, workers and health service providers. For example, adjusting premiums according to a firm's health and safety record may encourage safer practices by employers, and in turn reduce the incidence and severity of workplace injuries and illnesses.

"This review will be a valuable tool for the policy arena," says Emile Tompa, who is coordinating the project. Tompa is an associate scientist at the Institute and manager of Workforce / Population Studies. "The project will provide a non-technical summary of the evidence, together with a discussion of the policy implications of the findings."

The project consists of a systematic review of the published research on disability compensation and occupational health and safety regulations. It will include a quality assessment of each article and a "best-evidence synthesis" of the impact of specific design features. Although there are several review articles on the behavioural outcomes of compensation system design features, none are as comprehensive as this review, and none have undertaken quality assessments of the literature or a best-evidence synthesis.

The principal design features investigated in the literature are experience rating, wage replacement, and occupational health and safety regulation. Some research investigates the nature of health care and rehabilitation service provision. Behavioural outcomes are usually some form of claims activity (such as changes in incidence of claims, duration of time away from work, or the nature and dispute over claims/injuries), but could also include wages paid, productivity, and labour-force participation.

"Reducing the social costs of work-related injuries is an fundamental policy

objective," says Tompa. "Specifically, identifying program features that encourage employers to adopt safer practices or determining the adequacy of compensation and the optimal level of wage replacement are important though difficult tasks. Empirical analysis can assist in addressing these concerns by quantifying the behavioural impact of varying the features of the workers compensation package, which in turn can help identify means to improving the effectiveness of the program." 🏡

*For more information, contact Dee Kramer, Research Transfer Associate by e-mail: dkramer@iwh.on.ca, or by phone: (416) 927-2027 Ext. 2146.*

## TRUST AND COMMITMENT. INSTITUTE AND CPRN HOST EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIPS ROUNDTABLE.

Two decades of dramatic economic change have transformed Canadian labour markets and workplaces. During this time, researchers have documented many of these new work and labour market trends.

Some include a growth in non-standard work; a widening gap between 'good jobs' and 'bad jobs'; reforms of income support programs; a near revolution in information technology; and economic globalization. Little is known, however, about the impact of these economic changes on the *employment relationships* that underlie work structures.

This past June, the Institute for Work & Health was co-sponsor of a Roundtable on Changing Employment Relationships, presented and led by the Ottawa-based Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. (CPRN). This meeting brought together 40 stakeholders, including policy-makers, employers, legal experts, and researchers, to provide feedback on preliminary findings from telephone surveys and focus groups. Through this study, the CPRN defined employment relationships along five key dimensions: trust, commitment, communication, influence and legal rights.

The study examines how the characteristics of individual workers and their workplaces influence the nature of the employment

relationship. As well, it is looking at the influence of factors such as organizational restructuring and downsizing, and how employment relationships are associated with quality of work life and organizational effectiveness.

As an example, it will try to reveal the extent to which persons who are in work relationships that are characterized by high levels of trust, commitment, influence, and communication, are more likely than others to rate their health as very good or excellent, or to report high levels of job satisfaction. Findings from this investigation will help workers, employers, governments, unions and other labour market stakeholders respond to the challenges posed by changing employment relationships.

Feedback received from the June Roundtable will be incorporated into a final report to be released by the CPRN in late fall 2000. A report summary will be widely distributed through a number of channels including the media, and a copy of the full report will be available on the CPRN's website at: [www.cprn.org](http://www.cprn.org).

If you would like more information about this study, please contact Greer Palloo, Institute for Work & Health at (416) 927-2027 Ext. 2131, or Grant Schellenberg, Project Manager, CPRN at (613) 567-7500. 🏡

( ← Continued from cover )

"We are pleased to see the results — in print and online — of this long-term partnership between the Institute and the OMA. We think this collection of material will be a valuable resource for physicians and other health professionals in effectively managing the return-to-work process for injured workers," said Institute president Terrence Sullivan.

To facilitate improved understanding and management of return to work for ill and injured patients by physicians, the guide will be distributed this fall to Ontario's five medical schools, anticipating its incorporation into the curriculum for third or fourth year medical students in 2000–2001. Family practice, physical medicine and rehabilitation, and occupational medicine residents will also be introduced to the guide. 🏡

*For more information on this project, contact Rhoda Reardon, Research Transfer Associate at the Insitute. She may be reached by e-mail: [rreardon@iwh.on.ca](mailto:rreardon@iwh.on.ca), or by phone: 416.927.2027 Ext. 2174.*



# Workplace

## INSTITUTE BEGINS RSI BENCHMARKING STUDY

The Institute will be collaborating with the Workplace Safety & Insurance Board (WSIB) and a multi-stakeholder working group on RSI to identify and disseminating best practices used by workplaces to identify risk factors that may lead to RSI (repetitive strain injury, also known as work-related musculoskeletal disorder) in their workplaces.

This project is building on the two Future Search conferences organized by the Institute. The first was held in May 1998, and was attended by 55 stakeholders from diverse backgrounds and organizations. The second was in February 1999. It covered the current state of knowledge and effective practices on preventing RSIs. Out of these two conferences came a number of RSI multi-stakeholder action groups, one of which will be involved in the benchmarking study.

- The proposed process will be:
- ▲ Clarifying activities to be benchmarked;
  - ▲ Identifying potential workplace partners and securing their participation;
  - ▲ Developing a questionnaire on RSI risk factor identification;
  - ▲ Visiting a number of workplaces that have RSI programs;
  - ▲ Compiling and analyzing the information gathered through the questionnaires;
  - ▲ Reporting the findings to other interested workplaces and partners throughout the province;
  - ▲ Communicating the findings widely.

Institute researcher Michael Polanyi, and Dee Kramer, Research Transfer Associate, will be working closely with David Lindeman and Ilene Stones from the Best Practices branch of the WSIB on this project.

“We want to assist workplaces in identifying practices that may help them prevent injury and illness,” says Lindeman. “Benchmarking searches out successful occupational health and safety practices that workplaces can use to identify solutions that may work for them.”



# Research

## RECENTLY PUBLISHED:

### Working Paper #91

*Health care utilization and workplace interventions for neck and upper limb problems among newspaper workers.* (Swift et al.). An evaluation of data obtained during the Institute’s research at The Toronto Star. 🏠

### Grand Rounds videos

The latest videos in the IWH/WSIB Grand Rounds series are now available for purchase. #9: *Work-Ready: Return-to-Work Approaches for People with Soft-Tissue Injuries* and #10: *Functional Assessment in Return to Work* can be purchased by contacting Greer Palloo, at (416) 927-2027 Ext. 2131, or by e-mail: [info@iwh.on.ca](mailto:info@iwh.on.ca). Visit our Web site [[www.iwh.on.ca](http://www.iwh.on.ca)] for more information on the Grand Rounds video series. 🏠

### Special Report

The Institute has produced a special report on its Healthy Workplace Balanced Scorecard Project. This report on the scorecard highlights an important Institute message: What gets measured, gets done: Tracking a balanced set of key “healthy workplace” indicators can improve your workplace’s health and safety. Improving the health and safety of employees, and creating a healthy workplace, makes good financial sense: there is decreased absenteeism, and more satisfied employees which may enhance individual and organizational performance. The report will be available soon on the Institute’s Web site: [www.iwh.on.ca](http://www.iwh.on.ca). 🏠



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