

CASE STUDY: Early Intervention in Workers' Compensation Bay Cities Joint Powers Insurance Authority

A joint "Early Intervention" program leads to prompt reporting of injuries, quality medical care, and significantly improved return-to-work results.

Savings and results! – In today's tough economic climate, these are the primary objectives for many organizations. With the continued high costs of workers' compensation (WC), employers are now seeking proven strategies to reduce claims, medical costs, and indemnity expenses associated with their work-related injuries. A traditional challenge has been the frequent delays in injury reporting, which can trigger a chain reaction of setbacks in managing claims for optimal costs, medical outcomes, provision of benefits, and return-to-work (RTW) results.

To address these challenges, the members of the Workers' Compensation Program at the Bay Cities Joint Powers Insurance Authority (BCJPIA) implemented a joint "early intervention" program—offered by Company Nurse and Bickmore Risk Services and Consulting (BRS). Initially formed in 1986, the BCJPIA is a joint powers insurance authority consisting of nineteen members, including cities, towns, a redevelopment agency, and a police authority—all located within 100 miles of the City of Emeryville, California. In addition to providing insurance coverage and risk management programs, BCJPIA purchases and shares administrative and professional services, such as claims management, risk management, and loss prevention. The BCJPIA Workers' Compensation Program was initiated in 2002 with fifteen members currently participating.

The BCJPIA Workers' Compensation Program offers affordable coverage and risk management aimed at reducing the cost and frequency of the members' claims. The BCJPIA experienced two key challenges in the workers' compensation program: 1) many injuries were reported late, and 2) members were experiencing a significant number of "lost work" days. In this case study, we'll outline how this joint "early intervention" program enabled BCJPIA to reduce overall workers' compensation claims and costs, as well as overcome traditional barriers to prompt reporting, appropriate medical care, and early RTW.

The Need for Early Intervention

BCJPIA's early intervention program is initiated on the day of injury—the earliest, most critical point at which an organization can exert control over medical care, claims costs, RTW outcomes, and employee satisfaction. As this case study demonstrates, this proactive approach has enabled the members of the BCJPIA workers' compensation program to positively shape the overall nature, duration, cost, and outcome of its workers' compensation claims. The program focuses on two main solutions:

- * **Company Nurse Triage Call Center.** The BCJPIA utilizes Company Nurse’s call center to report and triage on-the-job injuries. The call center nurses have the medical expertise necessary to be able to assess injuries over the phone and triage injured workers to the most appropriate level of care.
- * **Bickmore Risk Service’s RTW Coordination.** The nurse triage program works in close collaboration with Bickmore’s highly structured and systematic RTW program, which focuses on minimizing lost time and lowering indemnity costs.

“BCJPIA’s mission is to provide cost-effective, fiscally sound coverage for its members,” said Jacquelyn Miller, Workers’ Compensation Program Manager at BRS. “Toward this objective, we were contracted to provide BCJPIA with comprehensive management for several of its insurance and risk management programs. This includes oversight of its third-party administrator (TPA), performing loss assessment surveys, providing litigation management, and offering extensive safety training. These services have all contributed to BCJPIA’s success. However, the focus of this case study will be our two-part early intervention program for workers’ compensation.”


“In the past, the workers’ compensation process at BCJPIA was highly reactive,” said Dennis Chandler, Director of Sales & Marketing at Company Nurse. “The collaboration between Company Nurse and Bickmore Risk Services enables claims, medical, and risk management professionals to get involved much sooner in the process in order to proactively manage medical care and RTW to bring about the best-possible results. Our two companies have fine tuned early intervention, so we communicate and collaborate toward optimal success and savings for our clients.”

Timely Reporting of Injuries

Although it’s well understood that prompt reporting of injuries leads to improved claims costs and outcomes, there are still many barriers to accomplishing this best practice.

“Because a large risk pool like BCJPIA is distributed and de-centralized, the injury reporting process becomes complex due to its various reporting layers,” said Kristen Vanscourt, RTW Coordinator at BRS. “For example, an employee will report an injury to the supervisor, who fills out the required paperwork and submits it to the HR department, who then notifies the third-party administrator. With this multiple-step process, there are many opportunities for delay and miscommunication. By the time claims adjusters receive an injury report, five to ten days may have already passed, negatively impacting our ability to manage those claims.”

“Our HR department is the primary contact for Union City’s workers’ compensation claims,” said Diane Morimune of Union City, a member of BCJPIA. “As a full-service HR department, we are also responsible for all benefit administration, recruitment of new employees, staff training, and development of safety programs for over 280 full-time employees and 100 part-time employees. Needless to say, we’re extremely busy. In the past, we experienced significant delays between the time injuries actually occurred and when they were reported to our department.”



“When a claim is reported late, typically everyone goes into panic mode,” said Ms. Vanscourt. “They must go back and try to find out when the injury originally occurred, whether the employee was medically treated, and if so, what the physician recommended in terms of treatment and RTW.”

With the Company Nurse Call center, the injured worker or supervisor simply calls the toll-free hotline to report injuries at any time of day—24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In cases where the employees don’t speak English, translation services are available. Within minutes of the call, Company Nurse sends the initial injury report, via email or fax to all the appropriate stakeholders, including the employer, HR liaison, TPA, physician, and RTW coordinator.

“Company Nurse’s call center is so simple and easy to use that the result has been a significant improvement in timely injury reporting,” said Ms. Vanscourt. “Now in most cases, the right people find out about injuries on the same or next day. By receiving immediate notification, everyone is able to promptly initiate their respective roles in the WC process, allowing each person to optimally affect the claims outcome.”

Nurse Triage for Appropriate Medical Care


Beyond timely reporting, another challenge for the BCJPIA is making sure injured employees receive quality, cost-effective medical care. As the first step, it is important to utilize appropriate providers who are experienced in treating occupational injuries. Although many BCJPIA members had established a list of clinics and providers, the rate of referrals to these facilities was low and inconsistent. Many members did not have a process in place to ensure their referral protocols were consistently followed.

“When the program was first implemented, with the assistance of BRS, the members did a lot of work to identify and select the best, most appropriate occupational clinics,” said Mr. Chandler of Company Nurse. “BRS performed outreach to make sure providers understood BCJPIA’s workers’ compensation objectives, and to achieve best-possible RTW results, BRS made physicians aware of the fact that modified duty assignments would be available to accommodate employee work restrictions.”

“Generally, managers and supervisors do not have the medical expertise or objectivity to assess an injury and direct the injured employees to the right level of care,” said Julie Theirl, Return to Work Manager at BRS. “Nor should they be expected to make these types of medical decisions. By using Company Nurse, the medical triage and referral process is elevated so a medical professional now performs the injury assessment and will help the injured employee determine if medical treatment is necessary, not the supervisor.”

“In many cases, Company Nurse may conclude that an employee has a minor injury, and that the most appropriate care is simple first aid. After speaking with a nurse, many injured employees do not require or request additional medical services. As a result, we have a significant number of ‘report only’ or ‘first aid’ types of incidents, in which no medical treatment is necessary,” said Leticia Najera in the HR Department of Union City.

“In addition, the BCJPIA has experienced a 37% non-referral rate, which means that 37 out of 100 injuries do not result in a referral for medical care. In this way, Company Nurse has helped to reduce claims and medical costs,” said Ms. Miller of BRS.





Structured Return-to-Work Coordination

Establishing a RTW Culture

“A RTW program is a key component to loss control in a workers’ compensation program,” said Ms. Theirl. “To address the challenge of lost time, we designed a structured RTW program, which would help to facilitate the essential steps and vital communication necessary to get employees back to work as soon as possible.”

“As we implemented the program, we realized we needed to help employers see the benefits of returning employees to modified duty,” said Ms. Theirl. “Many had an all-or-nothing attitude, classifying injured employees as either off duty or released to full duty.”

The Importance of the BRS RTW Coordinator


“In the past, the path of least resistance was obviously the easiest one to follow,” said Mr. Chandler of Company Nurse. “But it inevitably led to high indemnity costs. Many members tried to institute RTW programs on their own, but they didn’t gain traction. The missing factor was centralized management. To address this issue, BRS provides a RTW coordinator, a specialized workers’ compensation professional who assists members in facilitating RTW for each and every claim.”

“Members rely on the BRS RTW coordinator as an advocate who communicates with the treating physician, as well as establishing RTW expectations with members, supervisors, and injured employees. Now, there’s a greater level of accountability and oversight, which enables ongoing adherence to RTW objectives,” said Mr. Chandler.

“To date, the BRS RTW coordinator has built a significant level of trust with members. The early intervention program wouldn’t have been as successful without the vital relationships the RTW coordinator has developed and which has enabled a collaborative process among all stakeholders. My experience is that without the role of the BRS RTW coordinator, it would have been much more difficult to achieve the same level of savings and success,” said Mr. Chandler.

“We believe Bickmore’s RTW program and modified duty have provided our injured employees with an opportunity to come back to work in a modified capacity, and to transition back to full capacity with a greater degree of success. By helping our employees to maintain a productive work life, Bickmore’s RTW coordinator has helped our employees recover sooner,” said Diane Morimune of Union City.

“The BRS RTW coordinator receives injury reports from Company Nurse, so we can immediately initiate the RTW process with members and physicians,” said Ms. Vanscourt. “If the employee was referred for medical care, we call the clinic or physician to see if the injured employee will be released to full or modified duty, or require time off. We inform the member of the employee’s work status, and help them determine if the department can accommodate the injured employee with a modified duty assignment.”



Online RTW Database & Tracking System

“I previously worked as a claims adjuster and claims manager, so I understand the importance of getting employees back to work as soon as possible,” said Ms. Vanscourt. “The key to our success is having pre-established transitional assignments that stand ready to use when injuries occur.”

“We use the ‘RTW NOW’ online database that houses essential job descriptions and transitional work assignments. Members have reviewed and pre-approved these descriptions during the implementation process. This system saves me a lot of time. Since these assignments are pre-approved, we often use the database as a starting point to identify appropriate modified duty. In some cases, we work with members to make adjustments to better accommodate an employee’s particular work restrictions. We then send the job description and transitional assignment to the treating physician, so he or she can use this information to make a more informed and accurate RTW decision,” said Ms. Vanscourt.

“The online database also allows the BRS RTW coordinator to monitor the employee’s work status and see who has returned to work and in what capacity (modified or full duty). They can also track the number of lost-time claims and total lost days, in order to continually strive for program improvements,” said Ms. Vanscourt.

Employee Benefits & Member Satisfaction

“In terms of the benefits to injured employees, they’re able to speak to a nurse about their injuries, which gives them peace of mind,” said Ms. Vanscourt. I’ve had a lot of injured employees tell me that the nurse call center and injury triage process has worked well for them.”

“With BCJPIA, we deal with a lot of public safety professionals, such as police officers and firefighters, who work late night shifts,” said Ms. Vanscourt. “If it’s not a critical injury, they can call the hotline, and a nurse can provide them with simple first aid guidelines and direct them to visit an occupational clinic first thing the next morning to get the injury checked out. These employees receive medical advice right away, but they avoid busy emergency rooms, where they might wait several hours for a minor injury to be addressed.”

“From Bickmore’s point of view, we have been thrilled with our partnership with Company Nurse,” said Ms. Theirl. “At first, members were skeptical about the benefits that a nurse call center would provide. When members and employees began to call in and realized they were not speaking with a claims person, but a registered nurse whose primary concern was getting the employee the best, most appropriate level of care, they immediately understood the benefits of the program.”

“Bickmore Risk Services and Company Nurse have helped us to achieve our workers’ compensation goals, particularly in regards to reducing late reporting of injuries. Receiving injury reports on a timely basis allows us to be proactive. We now know when employees have been injured—there has been a benefit to receiving this information immediately,” said Ms. Morimune of Union City.

Results, Savings & ROI

Since injuries are reported on a timely basis and RTW is immediately initiated, Company Nurse and Bickmore Risk Services have been able to achieve substantial results for BCJPIA. Since the program was initiated in July 1, 2006, BCJPIA derived the following benefits from this joint early intervention program:

- * 15% decrease in total incurred costs
- * 65% reduction in temporary disability costs
- * 39% reduction in temporary disability days
- * 36% of the injuries reported do not require or request a referral to a medical provider
- * 39% reduction in workers' compensation claims

“Areas where BCJPIA experienced the highest reduction was in lost time, indemnity expenses, and temporary disability costs. There was also a significant decrease in the overall number of claims, and a higher percentage of injuries that did not require medical treatment, which reduced medical costs as well,” said Ms. Vanscourt.

“Employees receive medical advice immediately following their injuries and we're able to have the BRS RTW coordinator and claims management staff promptly initiate their roles. As a result, there is value and a positive impact throughout the BCJPIA's workers' compensation program,” said Ms. Theirl.

A Key to Success: Obtaining Member Buy-in for the Program

“When we first presented BCJPIA with the opportunity to pilot this joint ‘early intervention’ program, there was some initial hesitancy and difficulty in obtaining member buy-in. Not everyone was excited about the program,” said Ms. Miller of BRS. “Some believed it would add yet another step to an already complex process. Some members had the perception that by implementing this initiative, they would relinquish control and ownership over their workers' compensation program. Our approach was if members didn't want to participate, they didn't have to.”

“Many chose not to sign up right away, and the savings began to speak for themselves. Members began to experience a decrease in claims and reduced lost time, and we widely publicized the results—which enticed other members to sign up. In addition, there was a lot of word-of-mouth marketing going on, as members began to talk about the simplicity of the program and how it actually reduced their workload. Supervisors were happy that they didn't have to fill out paperwork or fax in forms. More members became open to implementing this joint solution,” said Ms. Miller.

“For Union City, adopting the program was an easy process,” said Ms. Najera of Union City. “Previously, our department supervisors had to complete the claims paperwork, now they pick up the phone and report the injury. Company Nurse handles the initial injury report form, and our HR department receives it via email. It's that simple.”

A Bright Future for Early Intervention

Ultimately, workers' compensation losses impact an organization's bottom line, so containing these costs is critical. A nurse call center provides the medical expertise and injury triage to initiate workers' compensation claims down the right course, immediately from the date of injury. By enabling optimal injury management and quality medical care, employers have reduced medical costs by as much as 20%, and by integrating a structured RTW program, injured employees recover and return to work sooner—reducing lost time by as much as 50%.

This case study is one example of an organization using a nurse hotline and an integrated RTW program with significant savings and benefits. In the end, these public entity employers also send a clear message to their employees—that they care about their health, safety and recovery.

With all these benefits, employers can decrease overall workers' compensation costs an average of 10 to 30 percent. For organizations that already experience excellent program results, improvements may be more modest, but even single-digit reductions may help in today's difficult economic environment.

About Company Nurse Recognizing that in workers' compensation programs, the “day of injury” represents the earliest, most critical point at which organizations can exert the greatest control over claims costs and outcomes, Company Nurse provides organizations with comprehensive “Day of Injury” management services, which provide optimal costs and outcomes. For more information, go to www.companynurse.com or call (888) 817-9282.

About Bickmore Risk Services and Consulting Bickmore Risk Services and Consulting is one of the largest and fastest growing independent risk management and actuarial consulting firms in the US. We have clients in 30 states--public and private sector organizations who rely on us to protect their human and financial resources from the costs of work-related injuries, liability claims, and property losses. We accomplish this by forming and managing "self-insurance" programs, and by delivering innovative risk solutions that enhance business performance. For more information on Bickmore Risk Services and Consulting, log onto www.brsrisk.com or call 800-541-4591.

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