The treating physician's role in helping patients return to work after an illness or injury (Update 2013)

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CMA POLICY

THE TREATING PHYSICIAN’S ROLE IN HELPING PATIENTS RETURN TO WORK AFTER AN ILLNESS OR INJURY

(UPDATE 2013)

Introduction

This 2003 report by the Canadian Medical Association aimed to provide guidance on the role of the treating physician in helping patients return to work after an illness or injury. As the economy faced challenges, the focus was on ensuring that physicians understood their role in helping patients return to work. The report aimed to address the needs of employers, patients, and the healthcare system by promoting early intervention and regular follow-up to facilitate a safe and productive return to work.

Relevance of Return to Work

Return to work is an important aspect of overall health and well-being. It can enhance the quality of life for patients, reduce healthcare costs for employers and governments, and improve productivity in the workplace. The treating physician plays a crucial role in this process by providing medical assessment, diagnosis, and management, as well as coordinating care with other healthcare providers.

Physician Practice

Physicians are expected to be knowledgeable about return-to-work strategies and to communicate effectively with patients, employers, and workplace rehabilitation providers. They should follow established guidelines and ensure that patients are medically stable and able to return to work with appropriate accommodations. Proper communication and clear documentation are essential for successful return-to-work outcomes.

Compensation

The financial aspects of return to work are important for both patients and employers. Physicians should be aware of compensation guidelines and help patients understand their rights and responsibilities regarding benefits and workplace accommodations. This knowledge can help in negotiating fair compensation packages and ensuring that patients are properly reimbursed for their medical care.

Forms

Physicians are often required to complete forms related to return to work, such as medical release forms, fitness-for-duty certificates, and workplace accommodations requests. These forms should be completed accurately and promptly to facilitate a smooth return to work process. Physicians should familiarize themselves with the required forms and guidelines to ensure compliance with legal and ethical standards.