

Welcome!

Welcome to the March issue of **Forward Momentum**, where we will discuss how to optimize, protect and empower your workforce. OHS is all about you -- your business, your future, your forward momentum.

In this issue, we will present the article, "How Much is Disability Costing You?" discussing the costs associated with disability and how early intervention can play a crucial role in reducing those costs. (page 2)

We will also introduce you to our ErgoACE system, a marriage between award-winning Cardinus software, Workstation Safety Plus, and our proactive approach to immediate risk reduction. (page 3)

Your Partner In Health,



"How Much is Disability Costing You?"

The Science Says Early Intervention at the Work Place is the Key

-Bob Patterson,
Omega Health Systems

Much of the medical and ergonomic research on Cumulative Trauma Disorders is focused on Medical Cost savings. However, we all know that without surgery, the lion's share of dollars for these claims is spent on disability. Why do seemingly innocuous injuries like Carpal Tunnel Syndrome wind up costing so much in indemnity? And more importantly, what can be done to prevent this cost?

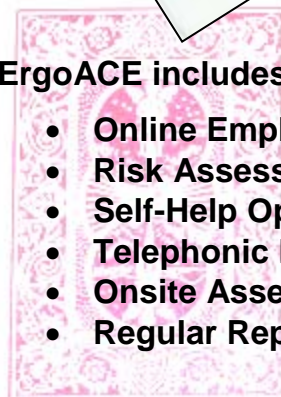


See "Early Intervention," page 2



ErgoACE includes:

- Online Employee Training
- Risk Assessment
- Self-Help Options
- Telephonic Intervention
- Onsite Assessment
- Regular Reports and Metrics



“Early Intervention” cont. from pg. 1

A recent study published in *The American Journal of Industrial Medicine* (W.E. Daniell, D. Fulton-Kehoe, and G.M. Franklin, “Work-Related Carpal Tunnel Syndrome in Washington State Workers’ Compensation: Utilization of Surgery and the Duration of Lost Work,” Volume 52:931-942, 2009) sheds some light on the problem. In this study, the authors found some alarming statistics in reviewing the carpal tunnel cases of over 13,000 subjects. They found that 63% of claimants with a carpal tunnel syndrome diagnosis went off work on paid total temporary disability. Of those that went off on paid disability, about half were off for greater than 3 months and a quarter of them were off on paid disability for greater than a year!! We all know how quickly those disability payments can add up - frustrating employers and insurers alike.

The good news is that there is something that can be done to reduce this financial strain from disability payments. Early intervention at the work site to remove those ergonomic factors causing the injury has been shown to dramatically reduce the incidence of short term disability (according to Sun Life's study, "Early Intervention Programs Can Speed Disabled Employees Back to Work"). In fact, with EARLY intervention in these potentially costly claims, the incidence of paid disability can be reduced by weeks and the medical costs of claims can be reduced by potentially thousands of dollars according to this study. The key is catching the problem and intervening early.

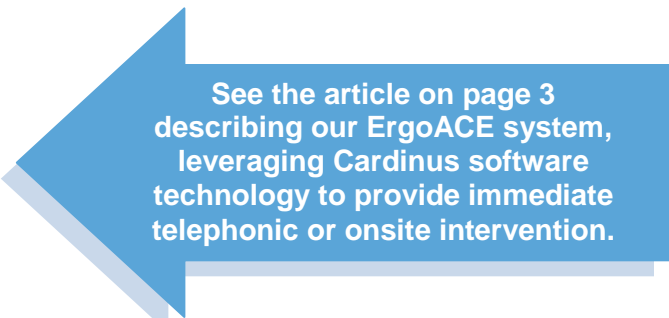
By all accounts, it is clear that certain adverse work conditions can lead to musculoskeletal conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Typically, once a claim is made, the employee will continue to work in the harmful work environment/station until the injury becomes so bad that the physician has no choice but to remove the worker from work so they can recover. Enter the disability expense. The research shows that early intervention reduces this expense because, quite simply, if you remove those factors that are causing the injury at the onset of the claim, the worker can begin recovering right away.

It makes sense when you think about it. We all know the old joke: When you tell a doctor “It hurts when I raise my arm.” What’s the obvious response of the doctor? “Well don’t raise your arm!!”

While this oversimplifies the ergonomic issues that can cause musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) such as carpal tunnel syndrome, it still bears a lot of truth. Remove the activities or stimuli that cause the injury and the injury can heal. Fail to remove those activities or stimuli and the injury won’t heal. It stands to reason then that if ergonomic solutions aren’t implemented right away, injured claimants will not heal and their claims will get expensive.

So then the real question is “Why don’t we intervene on day one with appropriate risk reduction solutions with all MSD claims like carpal tunnel syndrome?” According to the science surrounding these costly injuries, there is no support for waiting until it’s too late to provide ergonomic support. Typically in the workers’ compensation arena, we wait until a physician orders the ergonomics intervention before anything is done. The problem is, this can occur on the first visit (best case scenario for a speedy recovery) or it may occur sometime down the line three, six, twelve months later, (or sometimes never) – after the damage has already gotten too bad for the employee to recover without being off work on paid disability. It’s clear from the research that the best strategy to keep workers productive and on the job (and off the disability payroll) is to intervene early with every single MSD claim. Imagine a case load of zero lost-time MSD claims. This is possible with early intervention.

Early intervention is possible and simple. It is the immediate risk reduction accomplished through education, workstation design, behavior modification and follow-up. In our next article, we will discuss how you can automate some of these steps using ErgoACE, which leverages technology, in order to reduce disability and medical costs, increase productivity and profitability and give your employees the gift of great health.



See the article on page 3 describing our ErgoACE system, leveraging Cardinus software technology to provide immediate telephonic or onsite intervention.