

Frequently asked questions for supervisors

What is Work Connections?

Work Connections was developed by the University of Michigan to assist and support employees and departments when employees experience an illness or injury, during the subsequent recovery, and through successful return to work. We work with other available programs and services to ensure that employees and supervisors have convenient and centralized access to a wide variety of resources and support. Among other things, the Work Connections team coordinates the services of health care providers and other professionals to promote recovery as well as to ensure appropriate return-to-work support is in place.

How does Work Connections work?

Work Connections acts as a liaison with other programs and services at the University to ensure that you, and your employee, have convenient and centralized access to a wide variety of resources. These resources include everything from coordinating the services of nurses, vocational rehabilitation counselors, therapists, physicians, and other professionals interested in your employee's recovery to providing you with return-to-work support such as job analysis and ergonomic consultations.

Is there a cost to use WorkConnections?

There is no cost to your employee or your department to use the services offered by Work Connections.

What happens during the employee's time off for recovery?

Work Connections staff will assist and support you and your employee in the following ways during the recovery period:

- Contact the employee and you on a regular basis and act as a central clearinghouse for information
- Communicate with treating physicians and define options for treatment, facilitate care and identify what we can do to assist your employee during recovery
- Provide ongoing status reports and projections with respect to your employee's expected absence and duration of disability
- Respond to your questions or assist with identifying the appropriate resources or content experts to respond to your questions about benefits, employment status, salary, and other issues that may arise
- Explore options for assistance from other University resources
- Provide appropriate updates to you and the physician as needed
- Answer questions and provide health resources information to you, if needed

What about my employee's paycheck or other benefits?

Work Connections is responsible for administration of Workers' Compensation benefits and can answer any questions you or your employee may have about these benefits. Your Case Manager will also act as a liaison to help you understand other benefits or responsibilities you or your employee may have and coordinate communication with the appropriate offices.

What is Workers' Compensation?

Workers' Compensation provides for benefits conforming to state law, which may include wage replacement, medical, and rehabilitation benefits to employees who are injured or become ill as a result of a job-related injury (including death), or disease related to work.

What about confidentiality of health information? Could Work Connections ever share medical information with me against the employee's wishes?

Health information belongs to your employee and Work Connections guards it appropriately. This means that medical information is kept secure, private, and out of public view. Medical information cannot be sent to the home department, but updates regarding the employee's status, projected duration of absence and medical restrictions are provided regularly. Maintaining appropriate confidentiality is a fundamental principle of the program. Health information will be released only in the following circumstances:

- With written authorization from the employee
- When a strict need to know is established (e.g., for health/safety reasons or to make employment status decisions)
- To comply with the requirements of the Workers' Disability Compensation Act

Why does Work Connections request an Authorization for the Release of Patient Information?

Work Connections services are designed to provide assistance to employees in managing their disability and safe return to work. By authorizing Work Connections to obtain your medical information, your employee enables us to meet certain University requirements in order to expedite payment of their sick time or other disability benefits. In addition, developing a relationship with their treatment team and obtaining complete medical information is critical to coordinating an effective plan to help them.

Who is responsible for providing necessary medical documentation to justify an employee's absence?

The employee is responsible for providing sufficient medical documentation to support absence due to disability. Work Connections provides assistance by identifying what medical documentation is needed. As a courtesy, with authorization from the employee, Work Connections will request it from providers on your employee's behalf. If a treatment provider is non-cooperative, Work Connections will notify you and your employer that our efforts to obtain medical documentation on the employee's behalf have been unsuccessful.

What is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996?

HIPAA is a federal law developed to improve the portability of health care coverage for people who lose or change employment, promote administrative simplification through the use of electronic transactions, and ensure the security and privacy of personal health information.

Under HIPAA regulations, can a doctor or treating facility send medical documentation without written authorization?

- For work-related illness and injuries, medical documentation can be provided pursuant to the Workers' Disability Compensation Act. It's best, however, for employees to sign the Authorization to Release Patient Information Form since medical conditions may overlap and the absence of complete medical information could result in a delay of services.
- For non-work-related illnesses and injuries, the Authorization to Release Patient Information Form is required.

Can an employee divulge confidential health information?

An employee may voluntarily choose at any time to discuss a medical situation with anyone. This is a personal choice and is not required but, in many cases, sharing this information may lead to a great deal of support and encouragement.

Can the Authorization for Release of Patient Information be revoked?

Yes. Authorization may be revoked in writing at any time.

What if I do not agree with the plan or actions of WorkConnections?

Our primary objective is to provide assistance and support during recovery in order to facilitate a safe return to work. If there is a disagreement, discuss your concerns with your employee's Case Manager or the Work Connections supervisor. We will work with you to understand your concerns and find a solution.

What happens when my employee is ready to return to work?

Work Connections' objective is to facilitate a safe and lasting return to work. Our staff will work with you, your employee, and your physician to:

- Help evaluate essential functions of the job and anticipate needs for accommodations, if required
- Discuss and develop a return-to-work plan
- Maintain regular contact with you and your employee to coordinate the return-to-work plan
- Follow up on medical progress and assist with any medical issues after your employee has returned to work

What is a return-to-work plan?

A return-to-work plan is developed—with assistance from Work Connections—by you, your employee, and his or her treatment team. Among other things, it includes information about any physical restrictions such as lifting or sitting for protracted periods of time along with a target date on which your employee will be fully recovered and able to assume his or her regular duties.