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The Art of Written Communication in Workers Compensation

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Amxxx Risk Solutions, Inc.

Rebecca Shafer, JD

Throughout the workers compensation process you will frequently need to write letters requesting information from health care professionals, your claims adjuster, your broker, employees and others.

Make sure that your communication spells out in sufficient detail exactly what kind of information you want in response. For example, if you ask a treating physician for “a statement about whether the employee can return to work” you are likely to get back a vague statement like “the employee cannot return to work until seen by this office.” This document does not contain sufficient information to indicate if the worker is able to return to work in a transitional duty capacity, nor does it contain any information that is useful to the employer. To be useful, ask that the physician’s note include:

- Estimated return to work date
- Diagnosis
- Prognosis
- Treatment plan
- Follow up care information
- Medical abilities and restrictions detailing what the employee can do in a transitional duty job
- Next appointment
- Doctor’s phone number

One important use of clear letter writing is internal company communication. Written internal communication can set the tone of your company’s safety culture. For example, a CEO Roll-Out Letter is a good tool for transitioning your company into the implementation phase of workers compensation management. The CEO highlights the main features of your improvement plan program, such as return to work and a description of the general expectations for participation in the program.

Another good use of letter writing is to network and establish good working relationships. For example, if you have your injury coordinator write a letter to your insurance adjuster thanking them for their help in developing your workers comp program, you have set the tone for a future positive working relationship.

A few basics:

- **Consider using a form.** Tables with “to,” “from,” “subject” and “date,” for example, look professional and keep information crystal clear.
- **Use professional language** at all times. This is not the time for emotions or personal references.
- **Spell out abbreviations** on the first reference, even when you are sure your recipient knows them. You never know who else may handle your letter, including new employees, interns or temps.

- **Always include the time, date, your title, name and contact information** including phone numbers and email address.
- While emailing an attachment of your letter is the conventional method these days, **sending a hard copy in the mail is a good idea**, especially when requesting sensitive information or documents.

Communication in workers compensation is critical. Writing letters and documents require care and professionalism. Contact us for assistance in writing letters and setting up your workers comp management program

Author Rebecca Shafer, JD, President of Amaxx Risk Solutions, Inc. is a national expert in the field of workers compensation. She is a writer, speaker, and publisher. Her expertise is working with employers to reduce workers compensation costs, and her clients include airlines, healthcare, printing/publishing, pharmaceuticals, retail, hospitality, and manufacturing. She is the author of the #1 selling book on cost containment, [Workers Compensation Management Program: Reduce Costs 20% to 50%](#). Contact: RShafer@ReduceYourWorkersComp.com.

Editor Michael B. Stack, CPA, Principal, Amaxx Risk Solutions, Inc. is an expert in employer communication systems and part of the Amaxx team helping companies reduce their workers compensation costs by 20% to 50%. He is a writer, speaker, and website publisher. www.reduceyourworkerscomp.com. Contact: mstack@reduceyourworkerscomp.com.

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