



# The Occupational Health Services Project Centers of Occupational Health and Education (COHE)



## OVERVIEW

Washington's workers' compensation system spends about \$500 million annually on medical care for injured workers. Making sure that money is spent on effective, high quality health care is a top priority at the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I). To ensure best practices are followed in the delivery of occupational health care to injured workers, L&I has participated in a number of projects to test various healthcare delivery systems.

Building on those experiences, L&I worked in collaboration with business and labor organizations, community health care leaders and a University of Washington (UW) research team to develop a community-based approach to health care that has been implemented through Centers of Occupational Health and Education (COHE) in Renton and Eastern Washington.

Major components of the project appear to substantially reduce disability among injured workers while maintaining a high level of satisfaction with the care they receive.

## PROJECT GOALS

- Reduce disability and help injured workers **return to work** when medically appropriate
- **Early identification** of high-risk claims and improved **coordination** of care
- Foster adoption of occupational health **best practices** among providers, particularly in the areas of carpal tunnel syndrome, lower back sprains and fractures
- Increase employer, worker and provider **satisfaction** with the workers' compensation system
- Sustain and enhance **quality outcomes** for injured workers over time

## THE CENTERS

COHEs are administered by Valley Medical Center in Renton and St. Luke's Rehabilitation Institute in Spokane. The two centers offer providers

- Occupational health expertise
- Free continuing medical education
- Health services coordination
- Up-to-date information from new electronic tracking systems to assist with return-to-work process
- Financial incentives to use occupational health best practices

The Renton COHE began enrolling providers in 2002 and serves part of two counties in Western Washington. The UW completed an evaluation of the Renton COHE in June 2005.

The Spokane COHE opened in 2003 and is being expanded to provide the same services in 16 Central and Eastern Washington counties. The UW completed an evaluation of the Eastern Washington COHE in June 2006.

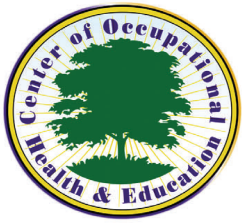
During the evaluation year, the COHEs together treated approximately 15% of all State Fund injured workers. A combined study of both COHEs is due in December 2006.

## THE FUTURE

**Our challenge:** Double the COHE effect on disability prevention

Project participants (COHEs, business, labor, community leaders, UW research team and L&I) are committed to reach this goal by:

- focusing on quality improvement of occupational health best practices
- sustaining positive outcomes
- continuing to use evidence and research to guide decisions about the future of the project



## Major Components of Centers of Occupational Health and Education



### OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH BEST PRACTICES

**Occupational Health Medical Directors and Clinical Administrators** provide direction, leadership and community outreach. They also actively recruit providers from the community to join the COHE.

**Participating Providers** receive training in occupational health best practices.

**COHE Mentors** include specialists who agree to see injured workers promptly and advise on clinical issues.

**Health Services Coordinators** facilitate return-to-work efforts with providers, employers, unions, and the workers' compensation system.

**Financial Incentives for Occupational Health Best Practices** are provided by L&I to enrolled physicians for the following services:

- Submitting accident report to the workers' compensation insurer within 2 days
- Documenting injured worker's physical status and limitations at each visit
- Contacting the injured worker's employer about return-to-work options
- Assessing barriers to return-to-work at 4 weeks of time-loss

### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

**COHEs** enhance occupational best practices by working with employers, unions, providers and the workers' compensation system.

**Community Leaders** from business, unions and clinical institutions provide support and expertise for the project.

### INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

**Case Tracking Systems** monitor the injured worker's progress and generate reminders to providers and health services coordinators, enhancing case management and rehabilitation.

**Performance Feedback** gives providers information on how well they are performing on best practices.

**Performance Data** are provided to the UW for the evaluation of the project.