

Limited English Proficiency in Workers' Compensation

Overview

Workers with limited English proficiency likely perform more hazardous work, experience higher rates of work-related injury and illness, and have worse disability outcomes.

This descriptive study compared workers' compensation (WC) claims for low back disorders filed by Spanish- and English-language preferring workers. Washington State WC state-fund claims were characterized by language preference for: employment characteristics, WC benefits and costs, medical evaluation and treatment, and occupational health outcomes.

The purpose of this study was to assess whether Spanish-language preferring claimants had similar time delays in claim adjudication and acceptance, received the same levels of WC benefits and vocational services for their injury, and had more or less successful return to work measures when compared to English-language preferring claimants.

Language Preference and Non-Traumatic Low Back Disorders in Washington State Workers' Compensation

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Key Findings

- Greater proportions of Spanish-language preferring (SLP) claims for non-traumatic low back disorders were accepted and resulted in lost work time compared to those of English-language preferring (ELP) claimants.

For compensable claims:

- SLP claimants had significantly different demographic, employment and occupational characteristics than ELP claimants.
- SLP claimants were more likely to have their claims protested by their employers.
- SLP claimants had greater time loss and claim costs, and had more physical therapy and vocational services provided during the course of care.
- SLP claimants received less back surgery.
- Time periods for benefits were no different between SLP and ELP claims, with the exception of time to first time loss payment.
- SLP and ELP claims had comparable permanent partial disability payments.

Impact

Spanish language preferring workers with non-traumatic low back disorders experienced different patterns of health care under workers' compensation and had more costly claim outcomes than comparable English language preferring claimants.

Find the article here:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ajim.20740/abstract>

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