Introduction

This guide will help the primary treating medical practitioner, employers, workers, return to work co-ordinators, injury management co-ordinators and workplace rehabilitation providers understand the role and functions of the primary treating medical practitioner in the injury management process.

The guide reflects the requirements of the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988.

What is a primary treating medical practitioner?

A primary treating medical practitioner is the medical practitioner (usually the injured worker’s general practitioner) chosen by an injured worker to participate in the injury management process.

The primary treating medical practitioner performs a central role in the primary care, recovery and medical management of an injured worker. The primary treating medical practitioner is part of the injury management framework and has continuing contact with the injured worker throughout the injury management and return to work process.

They are a source of important information; for example, diagnosis of the workplace injury, work restrictions, the certification of incapacity, and the co-ordination of treatment.

They can play a positive role in facilitating co-operation between the injured worker, the employer, the insurer, the return to work co-ordinator, the injury management co-ordinator and the workplace rehabilitation provider. They also play an important role in co-ordinating and delivering specialist medical care.

‘Medical practitioner’ means someone registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law in the medical profession; or someone authorised under another country’s laws to carry out the functions that, if carried out in Australia, would be required to be registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law.

The primary treating medical practitioner is responsible for:

- providing medical certificates
- diagnosing the nature of a worker’s workplace injury
- providing primary medical care for the worker’s workplace injury
- co-ordinating medical treatment for the worker’s workplace injury, including referring the worker to those who may deliver specialist medical care and co-ordinating the delivery of any specialist medical care
- monitoring, reviewing and advising on the worker’s condition and treatment
- advising on the suitability of the work that the worker may be expected to perform, and specifying any restrictions on this work
- taking part in the development of return to work plans and injury management plans.
Selecting the primary treating medical practitioner

An injured worker must choose their primary treating medical practitioner. They cannot be coerced into choosing a primary treating medical practitioner nominated by the employer or the insurer.

If the injured worker decides to change their primary treating medical practitioner, they must authorise the previous primary treating medical practitioner to release relevant medical records to the new primary treating medical practitioner.

Communicating with others

A timely response to requests for information by all participants involved in an injured worker’s return to work reduces delays in the injury management process.

The more familiar a primary treating medical practitioner is with the worker’s workplace and with the processes in place for return to work, the better the treatment and outcome for the injured worker.

Co-operating and communicating with the employer, insurer, return to work co-ordinator, injury management co-ordinator and workplace rehabilitation provider can help achieve this. Maintaining regular contact with these parties, and responding promptly to phone calls and requests for information, are ways the primary treating medical practitioner can do this.

Where disputes arise about the medical management of an injured worker, everyone must take all reasonable measures to work together.

How does the role of the primary treating medical practitioner relate to the return to work co-ordinator, the injury management co-ordinator and workplace rehabilitation provider?

As represented in this diagram below, the primary treating medical practitioner is a point of contact for the injured worker, employer, return to work co-ordinator, injury management co-ordinator and workplace rehabilitation provider throughout the injury management process.

They all complement each other through their collaboration and their commitment to returning the injured worker to early, safe and sustainable return to work.

Please note The Board = the WorkCover Tasmania Board. The Act = the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988.
Functions of the injury management co-ordinator

An injury management co-ordinator is a person appointed by the insurer of an employer. They ensure the injury management process runs smoothly by co-ordinating and planning the injury management process.

An injury management co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring that a return to work plan or injury management plan is developed. The primary treating medical practitioner must be consulted on the development of the plan (and any amendments to it) and should be given a copy of the plan.

The injury management co-ordinator must make direct contact with the primary treating medical practitioner:

- by telephone or in person (as paid consultations for both)
- as soon as practicable after the worker is assigned to the injury management co-ordinator
- to discuss work capacity, specific options for alternative duties and staged return to work.

For more information go to www.workcover.tas.gov.au

Functions of the return to work co-ordinator

The return to work co-ordinator provides the worker with workplace-based support and assistance throughout the injury management and return to work process. They will liaise with the primary treating medical practitioner as necessary.

Services provided by a workplace rehabilitation provider

A workplace rehabilitation provider is an organisation that provides expert advice and professional rehabilitation services to injured workers, particularly in more complex and difficult cases. It will liaise with the primary treating medical practitioner as necessary.

Independent medical reviews and medical examinations

If an injured worker claims compensation or receives weekly payments, their employer or employer’s insurer may require the injured worker to submit to an independent medical review.

An independent medical review is done by a medical practitioner:

- other than the injured worker’s primary treating medical practitioner
- with expertise relevant to the worker’s injury.

It may include:

- one or more examinations
- analysis of any diagnostic test results or other medical records of the injured worker.

The employer or employer’s insurer must discuss their reasons for calling for an independent medical review with the primary treating medical practitioner. The injured worker is then only required to submit to an independent medical review:

- after this discussion has taken place
- after the employer has told the injured worker (in writing) of the reasons for the review.

Once the independent medical review is completed, the medical practitioner who carried out the review must prepare a report for the employer or employer’s insurer — not the injured worker.

The employer or employer’s insurer then must provide the primary treating medical practitioner and the injury management co-ordinator with a copy of the report within seven days of receiving the report. It is the primary treating medical practitioner who then provides the injured worker with the report. The rationale behind the primary treating medical practitioner providing the report to the injured worker is that the primary treating medical practitioner is much better placed to understand the report, discuss sensitive issues or medical terms, and decide if a further report needs to be requested.
Specialists
Where an injured worker has been referred to a specialist, the specialist should ensure that the primary treating medical practitioner is informed of:

- the results of any diagnostic tests
- any treatment provided
- changes to prescribed medication
- the specialist’s diagnosis and prognosis.

Workers compensation certificates
To make a claim for compensation, an injured worker must obtain a workers compensation medical certificate from a medical practitioner.

The medical certificate is the first step of the return to work process. How an injured worker is certified will determine if they will stay at work after an injury at normal capacity or reduced capacity, or if they will be off work.

There are two medical certificates; the Initial and the Continuing/Final. They are designed to establish a worker’s capacity for work, expedite their return to work, and reduce the need for the insurer or employer to request medical reports.

An Initial Certificate validates a new workers compensation claim. It should only be completed upon the worker’s first consultation. It may also be used as a clearance certificate where the worker’s injury is minor and no further intervention is required.

A Continuing/Final Certificate supports an ongoing entitlement to workers compensation. It should only be completed upon visits subsequent to the worker’s initial consultation.

Further resources
For more information go to www.workcover.tas.gov.au and look under the health providers tab.