Hidden Opportunity: The Employee Experience and Workplace Injury Prevention
Finding and keeping employees is tough these days … and how to do it is a hot topic among management teams. Many companies are having success with a new approach: the “employee experience.”

The employee experience is not about putting a coffee machine in the office or adding a games area. It’s looking at things from the employee perspective and identifying what employees need in their day-to-day work experience to be successful and meet company goals. When you create an experience that connects with employee needs, it earns trust and produces results.

The employee experience offers a hidden opportunity for risk managers, HR or anyone involved in workers’ compensation management. By looking at things from the employee perspective, you can put a completely new energy around injury prevention and engage employees in a fresh way. When employees know their perspective is recognized, they become part of the injury prevention process instead of viewing it as a process to be followed.

At a time when businesses are working harder than ever to provide great customer experiences, the effort placed behind the employee experience should be no less. Employees want to feel the company cares for their well-being. In turn, companies will find that paying attention to the employee experience with workplace injury prevention will reduce cost and safety risks.

In this white paper, you’ll discover:

- Getting Started—Identifying Employee Concerns
- Comparing Off-Site vs. OnSite Experiences
- The Trend—Onsite Physical Therapy
- Employee Experience Meets Business Results
- 6 Actions to Take Today

“Employee experience is simply too important and too key of a business differentiator simply to be left up to chance. This employee experience design process isn’t just done for employees; it’s done with them. By combining employee engagement and experience to work together, organizations can build an environment where employees feel valued.”

What’s the Difference Between Employee Engagement and Experience, Inc.
Getting Started—Identify Employee Concerns

A great place to start is to ask employees how the program and process are working for workplace injuries and prevention. In many cases, workers often have no idea how to deal with the life disruption an injury brings. They're unsure how workers’ compensation “works”, how long the healing process takes, and whether or not they will be back to normal. It’s a scary situation, and undue worries can actually slow a worker’s healing and rehab.

Common Employee Worries

• Am I hurt and am I going to be able to work?
• What happens now? What can I expect?
• How long until I am back to normal or can do my normal job?
• I am worried that I will never be the same or I have a really bad problem.
• I don’t understand all the medical stuff. How can I make sense of it all?
• How do the doctors and therapists know what I really do for work?

The theme that appears in all these “worries” is a need for someone to talk to—a person who understands injuries, healthcare processes and the job site. The opportunity—change the employee experience by having a person onsite at your facility to work with employees. Employees get questions answered in a stressful situation, work with a familiar face and benefit from coaching to prevent injuries.

This raises a question—what is the impact of the traditional off-site clinical approach to treating workplace injuries? While effective in some situations, it often makes for a disappointing employee experience. Workers have indicated they find medical care intimidating, including not knowing what questions to ask, feeling “stupid” about not understanding the medical provider and struggling with communication to their supervisor.

Let’s take a closer look at how an off-site and onsite experience compares.
Comparing an Off-Site and Onsite Experience

The chart below illustrates the difference in experience between an off-site and onsite program. The big differences include how fast employees get information, opportunities for coaching right at the job site and a shift from treatment to treatment plus prevention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Off-Site</th>
<th>Onsite</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An employee who lifts 50 lb. sacks experiences back discomfort</td>
<td>An employee who lifts 50 lb. sacks experiences back discomfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The employee leaves work for evaluation and treatment</td>
<td>Employee immediately triaged by onsite provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about lift demands at work result in time off</td>
<td>Referral to physician with relevant job information for injuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time off continues for ongoing treatment</td>
<td>Onsite provider reviews job site with employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor approves return-to-work based on paperwork</td>
<td>Onsite provider suggests temporary work modification, provides treatment and coaching at facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus remains on treatment</td>
<td>Focus shifts to prevention: problem-solving, best work levels, risk assessment</td>
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</tbody>
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An onsite injury treatment and prevention model employs familiar faces employees will see every day and trust with their questions and concerns. As employees get to know an onsite healthcare provider, they become comfortable receiving care and asking for help.
In addition to comparing the experience, it’s also important to assess the difference in results. An onsite experience speeds return to work while lowering injury costs and the risk of reinjury.

Once you determine if inside care offers benefit to your organization, you need to ask the next big question. What type of onsite healthcare provider is right for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSIDE Onsite Care</th>
<th>Many Questions</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Unknown person</strong></td>
<td><strong>Employee Experience</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Slower</strong></td>
<td><strong>Return to Work Time</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Higher</strong></td>
<td><strong>Injury Costs</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Higher</strong></td>
<td><strong>Risk of Reinjury</strong></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTSIDE Clinical Care</th>
<th>Immediate Answers</th>
<th>Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Familiar Face</strong></td>
<td><strong>Faster</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Lower</strong></td>
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</table>

- **Tell me about your job?**
- **Can the job be changed?**
- **How do you move?**
- **Can your supervisor adapt your job?**
- **I have your job description.**
- **Let me watch you work.**
- **I think this can be changed.**
- **Let’s discuss ideas with your supervisor.**
Which Healthcare Provider?
A Hidden Opportunity

For many companies, the automatic assumption is that a nurse or off-site provider is the best way to meet employee needs. But a deeper look tells a different story about what can have an impact.

Typical injuries will always require medical care, such as bloodwork, MRIs, doctor visits, imaging, surgery and meds, and will always be serviced off-site. Typically, they make up 70-80% of the medical spend.

For an impact on the remaining 20-30%, what’s often overlooked is the area of physical therapy (PT). Successful PT programs meet multiple needs, both reducing treatment costs and building prevention for a double impact. Plus, PT, especially when onsite, improves the employee experience by reducing worries and uncertainty as well as prolonged absences from work.

What offers the biggest impact for your company? Let’s start with an assessment of options.

Nurse

A nurse at your facility can serve an important role with treatment of an injury—immediate triage or first-aid and determining the need for a doctor visit. Nurses focus on immediate injury needs but not on coaching to avoid future injuries. Employee communication is focused on treatment. For a highly effective program that blends treatment and prevention, nurses are often paired with physical therapists (PTs).

Nurse/PT Partnership

“The first nurse that I worked with mentioned that, had we (PT) not come onsite, she would have retired much earlier. The cases that we helped with were the ones giving her so much trouble and making work an unfulfilling place.”
Physical or occupational therapist

A physical therapist (PT) provides treatment plus injury prevention, problem-solving and coaching. With competency skills in both treatment and prevention, a PT can immediately address employee worries plus work with employees on coaching to prevent future injuries. An onsite PT can be particularly effective because they get to know employees, developing insight into needs and creating cooperation through direct communication. They specialize in workers’ compensation injuries, including comorbidities, disabilities or chronic medical conditions which continue to increase.

Physiologist, athletic trainer, personal trainer

Other allied health practitioners can assist with prevention and are often a good fit with an extremely young or fit workforce. With an aging workforce, they work best under a therapist with experience in workers’ compensation. They can be a force multiplier in large work settings, where there is consistent need for prevention and less coverage needed for treatment. It’s important to assess the level of training, certification/licensure and malpractice insurance levels of these professionals because their requirements are less consistent across the country.

Depending on the situation, each of these options can create a viable program. However, with the need to create better employee experiences to retain your workforce, onsite PT programs are gaining in popularity. A deeper look offers insights on why.
The Trend—Onsite Physical Therapists

While each option offers advantages and disadvantages, many companies today select onsite physical therapy programs. Onsite PTs create a stellar employee experience by:

Providing immediate triage. Workers are not always sure if they are actually injured, and may continue working to their own detriment — aggravating a minor discomfort into a major physical problem. An onsite PT can help with early assessment.

Recommending work modifications. Injuries are seldom an all-or-nothing event. Onsite PTs can advise ergonomic changes or adaptations that will allow workers to continue at their jobs while protecting the healing process.

Managing onsite treatment. Onsite PTs can provide treatment right at the work facility, prescribe activities that rebuild strength and promote healing, and counsel workers on what to expect during treatment.

Making knowledgeable referrals. When physician treatment is necessary, onsite PTs can refer workers to appropriate physicians/specialists. Most important, they can provide the consulting physician with all relevant information regarding the injured worker’s situation — something workers may have difficulty doing on their own.

Offering continuous coaching. Onsite PTs can monitor newly-healed workers to help prevent their injuries from reoccurring, and observe workers across the company to help them solve problems with performing tasks. By frequently visiting work sites, therapists get to know workers and their jobs and are accepted as members of the team. In addition, they develop a rapport with supervisors and are welcomed to discuss preventative ideas.

Onsite PT Program—Not as Expensive as You Think

When someone imagines setting up a PT program, the picture that comes to mind are all the shiny, big machines that you see in big commercial PT company. What is needed for a workplace injury prevention program is much simpler. Onsite clinics require very little equipment and floor space (as small as 8’ x 8’), which is often easily covered by the ROI projection.
Onsite PTs Address Employee “Worries”

I am worried that I will never be the same or I have a really bad problem.
Knowing what to expect and having a plan reduces worry. Some worry can lead to behaviors that slow healing or reduce interactions with friends, family and coworkers. Onsite therapists can answer worker questions and help workers keep on track with their healing and rehab plans.

I don’t understand all the medical stuff.
How can I make sense of it all?
Therapists can help workers make sense out of medical information (and correct misinformation). Workers, supervisors and HSE personnel have relatively easy access to onsite therapists and can help communication between medical providers and the workplace.

How do the doctors and therapists know what I really do for work?
Most onsite therapists understand physical job demands prior to injury (or can easily get that information), allowing for individualized care based on the specific injury. It helps medical personnel get accurate information quickly. The PTs understanding of work and the workplace allows more appropriate discussions and empathy.

I am worried that I may be going back to work too quickly. Am I going to get reinjured?
Some anxiety or worry is common as healing progresses and there is a return to normal activity. The onsite therapist can observe the worker performing tasks and help with advice and support during return to work transitions.

The Onsite Employee Experience—What PTs Observe

WorkWell Prevention & Care recently surveyed PTs working in an onsite program. All agreed that their presence has created a better employee experience at their respective companies — greater convenience than off-site treatment plus greater employee interest in injury prevention. Here’s what they said:

“We hear all the time how much the workers value our help deciphering what is serious from what is simply muscle overuse discomfort. Our early intervention allows strains and pains to be managed free of medication.”

“It is so superior to interact with employees in the space where they work and in the exact tasks they have problems with, instead of a mimicked scenario in the clinic.”

“I feel that off-site patients often struggle because the workers comp system is not what they need. On site, we can provide early reassurance, guidance for action, and a supportive workplace.”

“The first nurse that I worked with mentioned that, had we not come on-site, she would have retired much earlier. The cases that we helped with were the ones giving her so much trouble and making work an unfulfilling place.”
Employee Experience Meets Business Results

The Impact on OSHA Recordables and Claims

An onsite program helps an employer avoid or minimize OSHA recordables, occupational claims and medical and lost time costs. Here’s how:

- Onsite PTs understand the job demands and are readily available for problem solving, ergonomics and job coaching
- Research identifies that workers with unreported symptoms can be as numerous as 25-40% of reported injuries. Prevention and a culture of early reporting can help minimize overall claim costs and indemnity.
- Historical WorkWell data shows 90-95% of individual prevention episodes do not convert to recordable episodes or workers compensation cases. Providing onsite services results in approximately a 25% reduction of workers’ compensation claims.
- Onsite prevention services can reduce the risks that pain or concerns from work or home activities will impact the worker’s focus on job functions.
- An employer’s safety program will typically focus on preventing slips, trips and falls. Onsite prevention services can be a force multiplier for safety initiatives through ongoing worker coaching and education.

The Impact on Workers’ Compensation

Research shows workplace care minimizes time-loss and costs. Onsite treatment can help injured workers return to work sooner and remain job-attached following injury. Here’s how:

- The consistent availability of onsite physical medicine providers facilitates early referral and intervention. Bottom line—injuries are addressed faster.
- PTs understand physical job requirements to help their development of appropriate transitional work and stay-at-work plans. Stay at work initiatives keep workers engaged at work in a supportive environment vs. being potentially isolated outside of the workplace.
- Onsite treatment impacts the overall cost of claims, minimizing productivity loss because workers do not need to leave the worksite for periods of care
- Historical WorkWell data has shown reductions of 20-50% of incurred claim costs when program results are compared to similar severity adjusted historical claims or sites without onsite services. Treatment savings are often attributed to differences in the number of medical visits and avoidance of testing costs and surgeries.
- Results focus primarily on musculoskeletal claims, but most employers enjoy savings across their aggregate claim experience
6 Actions to Take Today

1. Talk to or survey your employees. What’s working and what’s not with injury prevention and treatment?
2. Run the numbers. A data model that analyzes your claims data compared to industry research results can uncover hidden opportunities for improvement.
3. Meet with a consultant. Consultants stay abreast of best practices and work with multiple companies. From experience, they know what works and what doesn’t.
4. Assess treatment vs. prevention. Are you spending more time on treatment? What savings could be gained by focusing on prevention coaching?
5. Discuss culture fit. Would an onsite PT who gets to know people and visits job areas fit well? Or does an off-site model better serve your employee community?
6. Consider expenses. What direct and indirect expenses are involved in an off-site program? An onsite program is often perceived as expensive—is that true?

An Employee Experience that Prevents Injury Claims

Making injury prevention part of the employee experience is a winning approach for both workers and companies. Workers have less worries and will more quickly raise potential red flags and ask for personal advice when they know their company prizes collaboration. Companies, in turn, can reduce their injury claims and workers’ compensation expenses.

About WorkWell

Quality care that’s everywhere. For over 25 years, WorkWell has helped companies reduce soft tissue claims with the industry’s most respected therapists—located everywhere. WorkWell OnSite Flex Fit transforms workplace injury prevention programs by emphasizing personal relationships between employees and physical therapists to create a better employee experience. A unique, field-tested data model helps companies determine the best mix of services to create a program that pays for itself. Learn more.