TRENDS IN MEDICAL CERTIFICATION OF INJURED WORKERS BY GENERAL PRACTITIONERS IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

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Background There is a growing recognition of the health benefits of work. General Practitioners (GPs) are encouraged to ensure injured workers return to the workplace, on the premise that return to work (RTW) aids recovery.

Aims/Objectives/Purpose To determine if GPs medical certification behaviour has changed over the 14 year period to 2010 in Victoria, Australia.

Methods We analysed a WorkSafe Victoria compensation research dataset of 317 744 working age individuals with 'lost-time' claims over the period of 1997–2010. Only the initial post-injury GPs certificates were included. Poisson count log-regression analysis was conducted to describe overall annual changes in amount and duration of 'unfit for work' and 'alternate duties' certificates.

Results/Outcomes A total of 204 614 'unfit for work' and 97 207 of 'alternate duties' certificates were analysed. We found a statistically significant decrease in the number of 'unfit for work' certificates, equal to 1457 fewer such certificates per annum in 2010 than in 1997 (by 6.8%, 95% CI –7% to –6.7%). However, a number of 'alternate duties' certificates raised by 1322 in 2010 than in 1997 (by 5.9%, 95% CI 5.1% to 6.7%). The average annual duration of 'unfit for work' certificates decreased by 1.6 ± 1.9 days, and by 2.9 ± 1.2 days in 'altered duties' certificates.

Significance/Contribution to the Field There have been significant changes in the medical certification of injured workers by GPs in the state of Victoria since 1997. The decrease in number of medical certificates and their duration suggests that GPs possibly play an important role in returning injured workers back to their workplace earlier.