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[COVID-19 Update: Responding to Patient Concerns Around Work Return — A Q&A with WorkSafeBC and the BCCDC](#)

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June 16, 2020

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Learning Objectives

1. Use key occupational medical concepts to approach patient and workplace questions about work return
 2. Clarify the role of physicians, patients and workplaces in responding to patient issues around safe return to work
 3. Integrate expert advice when responding to questions patients have about safe work return
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My patient tells me

I am concerned about work right now...

- I'm anxious to return to the workplace
 - I'm not sure my workplace is safe
 - I am a male over 50 years old with diabetes and hypertension
 - I care for my elderly mother in my home
 - My liver transplant patient on immunosuppressive agent want me to clear him for work
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Whose Role is it anyway?

- Physician/HCP

- Diagnose and treat medical conditions & support patients with common human concerns
- **Provide medical expertise to patient and workplace so *they* can figure out accommodations as needed**
- **Support your patient in fostering healthy communication with their employer**

- Workplace

- Provide 'safe' workplace
- Gather helpful information in designing workplace accommodations and implement workplace accommodations
- Communicate safety plan to employees

- Patient

- Inform workplace/employer about workplace concerns
 - Make decision based on information from MD/Employer combined with their risk tolerance
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Occupational Medicine approach

What are the Risks/Restrictions?

- Risk of harm to self and others... Physician prescribed
- **Sometimes restrictions are strictly medical**
 - Do not weight bear on your recent lower extremity #
 - Do not make critical decisions or participate in safety sensitive activities when prescribed new sedating medication
- **Sometimes this advice results from medical risks and societal values/regulations**
 - You must not drive after being diagnosed with new onset seizures until you have been seizure free for x months
- **How much risk is too much?**
 - Discuss with your patient – risks of work vs risks of not working, risks of activities they are already doing.

Expert resources

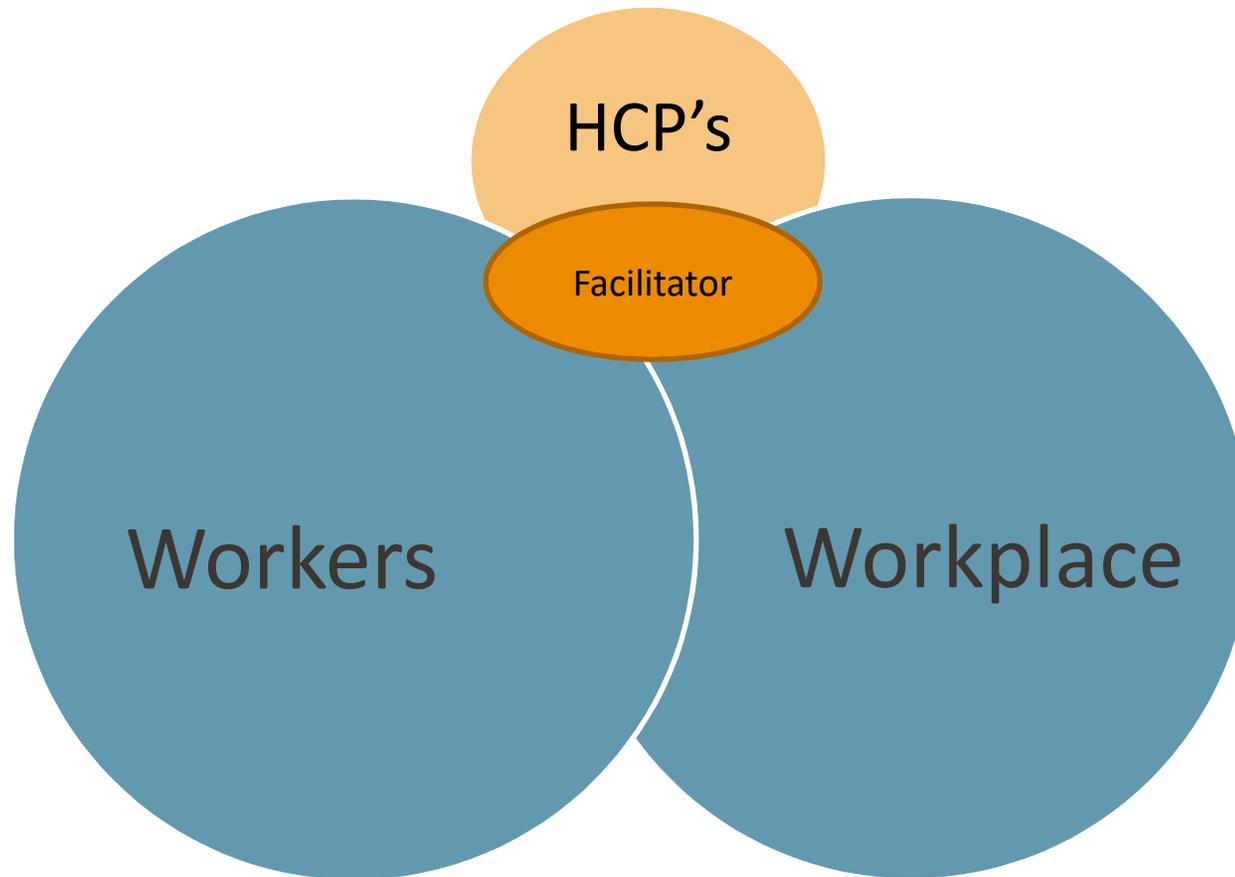
- Patient medical/surgical problem:
 - Review risks with the patient
 - Seek specialist's input
 - Occupational medicine expertise: at WorkSafeBC – leave message on WorkSafeBC Medical Advisor info line: 1 855 476 3049
- Workplace safety:
 - if your patient cannot resolve it with their workplace/union/OHS, right to refuse work contact WorkSafeBC 1 888 621 7233 (SAFE)

Occupational Medicine Approach

Capacity and Tolerance (or Limitations)

- What is your patient's capacity? (MD or other described)
 - Anxious about work return as normal human reaction during COVID-19
 - = capacity retained; may need reassurance/assistance
 - Meets criteria for anxiety disorder affecting concentration and judgement
 - Capacity for productivity and critical decision making reduced
- What is your patient's tolerance? (Patient described)
 - What is your patient's risk tolerance?

Roles



From Dr. Paul Farnan's presentation "Doctor I need a note for work", Jan 2011

My patient tells me

I am concerned about work right now...

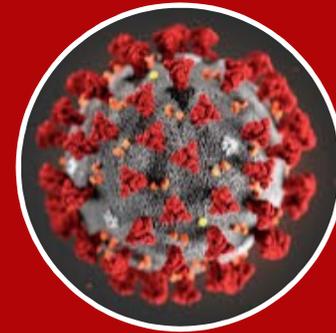
- **Are there any restrictions associated with your patient's medical condition(s)?**
 - If yes, then is it possible for the patient's workplace to mitigate the risks so that they can continue to work within those restrictions?
 - If uncertain, then who is best qualified to determine whether or not restrictions are appropriate?
- **Are the patient's concerns about the safety at their place of work or are they concerned about their medical condition?**
 - If it's the place of work then encourage communication between employee and employer. Escalate to union/OHS and then WorkSafeBC if no resolution. 1 888-621-SAFE



- Health
- Family
- Risk tolerance
- Work attachment



- Workplace
- Accommodations
- Communication



- Community prevalence
- Public Health Orders and Guidance

Providing Advice

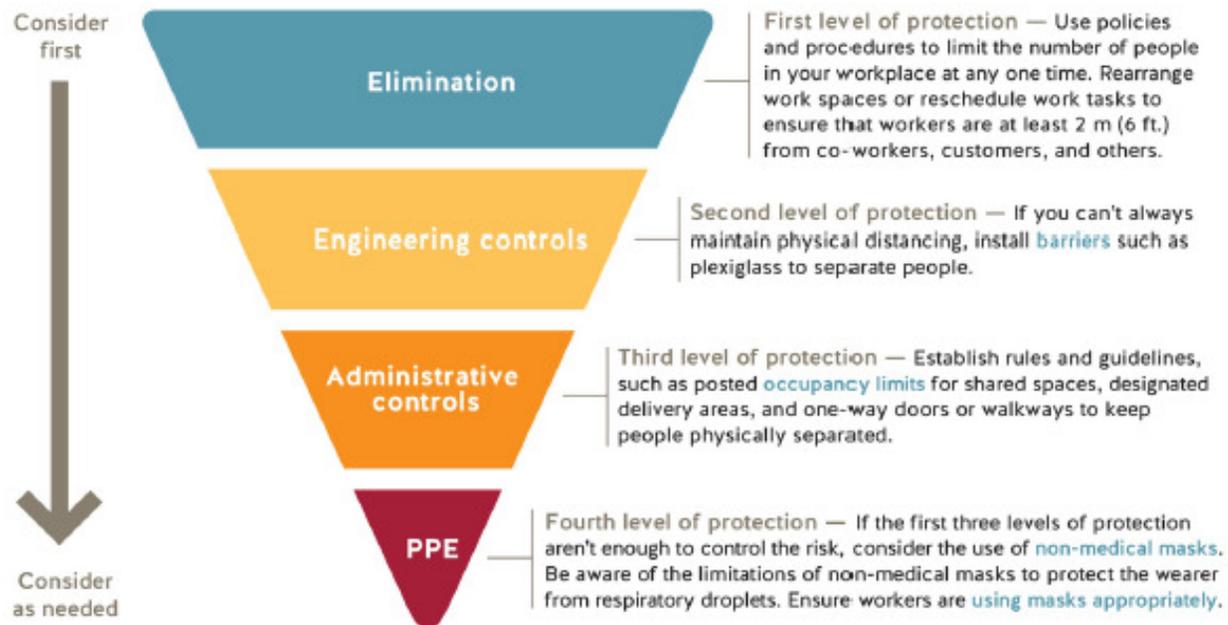
End of slides



Review of the Hierarchy of Controls

Reduce the risk of person-to-person transmission

To reduce the risk of the virus spreading through droplets in the air, implement protocols to protect against your identified risks. Different protocols offer different levels of protection. Wherever possible, use the protocol that offers the highest level of protection. Consider controls from additional levels if the first level isn't practicable or does not completely control the risk. You will likely need to incorporate controls from various levels to address the risk at your workplace.



How do I know if I am covered as a worker?

There are many possibilities

- For any work that is salaried, where you receive a T4, that portion of your work means you are covered ... you are considered a worker
 - (and you are not allowed to register as an employer)
- For incorporated physicians, you **must** register as an employer are considered a worker of your incorporation and are also covered
 - Your incorporation is the employer and is required to register as such
 - Rare exceptions
- For those considered independent operators, you are not covered unless you purchase personal option protection (POP)
 - WorkSafeBC will prioritize your application for personal option protection if you are not otherwise covered

Potential for severe illness

- Age >65y or <1y
- Residents of LTC
- Immunocompromised due to disease or therapy (e.g. cancer/treatment/transplant)
- Chronic disease (e.g. cardio/pulmonary disease, CKD, CLD, HTN, diabetes, smokers severe obesity, impaired resp. clearance), especially when poorly controlled or multiple co-morbidities

Assessment

- Local disease epidemiology
 - Medical status
 - Occupational activities and context
 - Non-occupational activities and context
 - Patient preferences
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Managing potentially high risk individuals

- Prevention
 - physical distancing, hand hygiene, environmental cleaning
 - Consider mask use as PPE for the very high risk
 - Chronic disease management
 - Immunizations UTD
 - Low-threshold for medical assessment & testing
 - May have atypical presentation
 - Consider repeat testing is initially negative
 - Notify public health as per local processes
 - Keep management plan sustainable
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Pregnancy and COVID19

- There is no standard guidance regarding work restrictions.
- If occupation other than health care, may continue to work until they deliver.
- Consider patient's comorbidities and individual work situation
- Risk mitigation (reassignment at term to a role with reduced risk of exposure or self-quarantine)
 - To reduce individual risk of being infected peripartum
 - Lower the risk of exposure to health care workers
 - Lower the risk of infant exposure