



OPTIMIZED OUTCOME SOLUTIONS

Something Ancient is New Again

Harey Warren, injured worker, and author of "The Optimized Patient"

At a prayer breakfast during a WCI convention in Orlando, Florida, I was struck by how forward thinking the presentation was while being so rooted in ancient Biblical text. The message of the prayer breakfast was that non-medical services can be just as important to the recovery of an injured worker as the latest medical technology. I have previously written about the healing power of a genuine “how are you” being asked on the phone of isolated and struggling injured workers. What was additionally startling to me about the prayer breakfast was that a “Christian” movement was nearly identical to the ancient Jewish practice of Bikur Cholim, translated literally from the Hebrew as - visiting the sick. Something ancient was new again in workers compensation and, I believe, essential to improving injured worker outcomes.

Patient education and the personal engagement around delivering that education to injured workers is receiving increasing interest from employers and insurers. The economics around the injured worker is well addressed in the grand bargain. So, why is visiting the sick so important and what is practical for the employer or the insurer in a contemporary worker comp setting? Emotions and economics rarely have anything in common. This is acutely true for the injured worker who is feeling isolated and depressed both because they are hurting and because they are away from the social aspect of the work environment.

We have all seen or heard about heart-warming stories where therapy dogs visit patients in hospitals to lighten the usually depressing experience of a hospital stay. As hard as this may be to believe, the Canadians actually did an exhaustive study to find out if the patients really wanted or needed these kinds of programs. This is a snippet of the conclusion from the National Library of Medicine, “The opinion of the majority of study participants was that they would like to have a visit by a therapy dog in the ED (emergency department) and perceived other patients to want to have a visit as well.” I am sure all of the animal lovers will find this data research on the glaring side of obvious! But, there it is in the data set; people who are ill feel better when a dog checks in with them. How much better does it feel when an actual human being checks in?

According to Julie Oltmanns of Zurich Insurance Group, who spoke at the WCI prayer breakfast, some of Zurich's employees are very active in a faith-based group dedicated to lifting the spirits of the injured. Julie gave a very inspiring talk about the value of non-medical services that should be part of assisting injured workers in their recovery. She and her colleagues have been providing non-medical support to the injured for quite some time with great success and more rapid recoveries. In my journey developing strategies to educate, encourage, and engage injured workers, one of the great joys has been to learn about initiatives like the one at Zurich to provide the “uplift” that so many of the injured workers and their employers can benefit from. It is most exciting to see that something ancient, the blessing of visiting the sick, is new again in Workers Compensation.