

Why Consider On-Site Physical Therapy?

Gary A. Higbee, EMBA, CSP, President and CEO of Higbee & Associates, Inc.

When asked to be a guest author for this edition of Accelerated Express, I had some deep reservations. I wasn't sure I had anything of interest to say to the reader. Even though I write over 30 articles a year for a number of publications, most of my 40 years of experience has revolved around safety and compliance. I thought I had very little direct experience with Physical Therapy or Physical Rehabilitation with the exception of treatment for my own personal injuries. Then I thought about how over the years a larger and larger percent of injuries have been falling under the strain category. You might have an interest in some of the approaches we have taken through ergonomic efforts to decrease the number of strain-related injuries. Ergonomics certainly has a direct relationship with Physical Therapy.

Ergonomics is often misunderstood and misapplied. When I look at ergonomics I think of three primary issues. I know there are many factors in ergonomic studies, but I simply look at three factors. Those three factors are Force, Position and Repetition. Of these three factors, repetition, is the least important. Now that statement might surprise you. I have found that the human body can handle a lot of repetition if the task they are performing is done with their body in the proper position or alignment and they do not have to exert excessive force. So when I look at the risk of a task, I'm much more interested in the position and force factors than I am how many repetitions there are to the task. This simplified method of risk evaluation has worked very well for the employees and organizations I have consulted with or worked for. Keeping things simple also increases efficiency.

There is something that increases the efficiencies of this process that may interest you. Later in my career I had the opportunity to work with on-site Physical Therapy. On the surface this looks to be a rather expensive venture but there are many benefits. I have listed just a few of the benefits of having on-site therapy below:

- 1. Immediate medical intervention** - Employee can receive immediate medical treatment rather than waiting until the injury has become more serious. Early intervention is always recommended.
- 2. Earlier reporting of medical issues** - Employees become more willing to report minor injuries because treatment is convenient to receive. They will resist treatment during off work hours or where significant travel is required. They will just live with the problem when treatment is a bother.
- 3. More Efficient and Accurate Evaluations of Risk** - The on-site Physical Therapist is a great source of help when evaluating tasks for cause or risk of injury. This would include evaluation of tasks where an injury has occurred and evaluation of tasks where no injury has occurred to date.

Over time every work task in a facility can be evaluated. Even more importantly, any new task coming into the facility can be evaluated before it is actually performed. This gives us an up front opportunity to adjust the task and prevent us from bring problems into the workplace.

4. Third Party Trust - The Therapist can develop a high level of trust among the employees that management can never attain. There is something about having someone trusted to talk to.

5. Cost Control - There are a number of ways on-site Physical Therapy can help control medical cost. The travel time to and from treatment is reduced. The hourly rate of the professional can be negotiated based on guaranteed volume. Employees who have experienced injuries can be more effectively used by assignment to temporary tasks that definitely meet their restrictions

As you can see my experience with on-site Physical Therapy has been very positive. I often recommend that my clients look into the process. You might also find the process very rewarding for your employees.



Gary A. Higbee EMBA, CSP is the president and CEO of Higbee & Associates, Inc. a full service safety training and consulting firm. He has over 40 years of experience ranging from working on the factory floor to upper management and is a board certified safety professional. Gary is available for consulting, expert witnessing and public appearances.

He can be reached at:

7167 Oak Crest Blvd.
Johnston, Iowa 50131
515-270-6623
g.higbee@mchsi.com
www.higbeeandassociates.com