

November 20, 2009

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir or Madam:

I would like to submit my opinion for your consideration regarding the proposed Inquiry into Australia Post's treatment of injured and ill workers.

I have been working as a medical practitioner for a period of eight years. The past six years have involved working in general practice and I have been actively involved in the early intervention program with Injurnet for a period of approximately three years.

In addition to providing medical advice and service to Australia Post, I have also been involved with worker's from a number of other large institutions, including Coles-Myer Group, Boral and Brisbane City Council, to name a few.

When Australia Post first introduced the current program, I was availed the opportunity to tour a number of their facilities, to provide a greater insight into the work that their employees undertake at the different locations. I had the opportunity to visit the Northgate Mail Centre (including both mail centre and transport functions), Albion Delivery Centre and Brisbane Airport Transit Centre (BATC). I was accompanied by a member from Australia Post head office as well as a local team member, who was usually a manager of the facility. During these visits, I was introduced to the diversity of work undertaken at these centres and demands placed upon the employees, both during their normal working shifts as well as during any rehabilitation process after injury. These visits were extremely beneficial and rewarding, as they permitted a greater understanding and insight into the work performed by the organisation.

Over the subsequent time I have been afforded the opportunity to attend refresher sessions and have further visits to maintain my understanding of the organisation and the demands placed upon its employees.

My personal experience regarding the early intervention program has only been a positive one. I personally find that most employees want to continue working and are grateful that alternate duties are available to permit them to remain in the work environment. The combination of prompt medical review with a medical practitioner familiar with the work environment, coupled with rapid access to rehabilitation via affiliated physiotherapists permits the vast majority of people to remain in the workplace without any detrimental impact upon their recovery.

Personally, I will always advise a patient when they are referred to me by Australia Post

or any other organisation that my role is to facilitate their recovery from their current injury, as well as attempt to ensure that the injury doesn't recur again in the future. I am also clear to point out that I do not work for Australia Post, rather I provide a service to them and their employees based on my knowledge of the work environments and work demands. Many workers have a degree of suspicion upon being sent to a facility nominated doctor like myself, with the often expressed term of 'the company doctor' being used. However, I have found by clearly stating my role and reason for involvement in the process, most workers are willing to be accept and actively be involved in the rehabilitation process. The vast majority of patients are able to resume their normal working duties within a brief period of time, and hopefully are better placed to avoid further injury in the future.

Another matter that I have noted is that quite often worker's present to me for the first time with a preconceived idea of me, based on conversations they have had with colleagues at work. I am grateful to say that most these experiences are of a positive nature and only help to reinforce my position of wanting to assist them return to normal working duties. On other occasions, patients admit that their union officials/delegates have advised them against attending the appointment. However, with insight and an understanding of the rationale behind the program, they tend to embrace the program and actively participate in their rehabilitation.

I have found that if, through either misunderstanding or miscommunication, a worker is asked to undertake work that contravenes their imposed restrictions, that worker is freely able to contact me and steps are taken to ensure that correct duties are afforded to them.

I have also acquired a number of Australia Post employees as private patients independent of work, after establishing a professional relationship with them during their involvement in the early intervention program.

I am also called upon to review patient's that have been initially seen by other doctor's due to either the time of their injury or their time of reporting the injury. Quite often these patient's have attended an emergency department or their own local doctor and are brought in for review the following day. Some occasionally have been issued a medical certificate for a period of time off work. When these patients are afforded the opportunity to understand the benefits of early return to work and the availability of alternate, more suitable duties, they are happy to participate. I also always inform patients that if they already have a medical certificate issued by another practitioner, they are entitled to adhere to that certificate, irrespective of what I might suggest. I believe that most people respect this statement and it shows that my role is to assist the patient, first and foremost.

On most occasions, the employees are not accompanied by managers or supervisors at their appointments. This is in contrast to a number of other companies, who send along a manager to accompany the patient to their appointment. At the completion of the consultation, I will call the manager involved and directly inform them of the return to work plan. This is undertaken to reinforce the directive given on the certificate that I

have supplied to the patient at the completion of the session. If any contentious point has arisen during the consultation, I will ensure that the patient remains in the room to witness the conversation. This, I believe, adds a greater level of independence to the consultation, as the patient witnesses the conversation being had regarding their rehabilitation.

I believe that Australia Post has a strong commitment to early intervention for their injured workers'. Through my involvement in this program, I would like to think that the worker's that I see make a more rapid and smooth return to normal pre-injury function.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide some input regarding this matter. I am happy to be contacted if further information is required or if I can be of any further assistance with this inquiry.