

## **A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO CLAIMS/INJURY MANAGEMENT AND REHABILITATION**

**Dr Christine Roberts-Yates**

I should like the Committee to accept this paper as a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Employment and Workplace Relations Inquiry into Aspects of Workers' Compensation.

Claims/injury management and rehabilitation is a complex process that needs analysis from a range of perspectives. Each claim involves a constellation of issues. The research intention is to assess how organisational practice or 'wholeness' of organisation could stimulate partnerships across the key stakeholder groups (worker, employer, case manager, medical and vocational providers). When such an orientation is in place the rudiments of effective partnerships are created. Such alliances will need to be interactive and will need to reflect learning at its various levels of complexity. It is expected that the constructs of such a partnership approach will evolve and be refined during the life of this research study. Currently the perceived substructure of the partnership approach that guides the research thinking includes:

- a process that enables all stakeholders to be active participants in the process;
- less emphasis on maintaining professional status;
- a willingness to adopt a partnership approach;
- a willingness to share and respect the perspectives of others;
- an eagerness to collaborate and reciprocate.

In terms of a partnership approach, it is necessary to acknowledge the skills, experience and personality of the stakeholders and to maximise the opportunities for collaboration. This research has adopted a stakeholder narrative methodology that highlights the concerns and issues of the key players. Issues and comments from the stakeholders have been identified and summarised and commonalities and differences recognised. It has highlighted good practice, strategies for improved service management and partnership practice. Problem representation of the stakeholders is integral to the development of the new multiple partnership model. As a result, the roles of stakeholders have been evaluated and the need for change identified. Communication between the stakeholders is embedded in the perceptions and attitudes of the various players at different stages in the process.

Claims/injury management and rehabilitation is a learning process for all stakeholders. This is often ignored by the system where organisational rigidity and fixed expectations of the system exacerbates problems and reduces the opportunity for change, and new ways of learning and reciprocity. It may be argued that what enables successful cost effective claims/injury management is the pooled wisdom, experience and practices of the stakeholders. The system needs to be more flexible in facilitating partnerships and new learning. This would require changes in terms of openness, opportunities for learning and new ways of interacting.

There are many different conceptions of what can be meant by partnership. The approach advocated as part of this research focuses on a concept of partnership that includes:

- Ongoing, open and respectful communication between the stakeholders;
- Stakeholders acquiring a detailed knowledge of the workplace;
- Collaborative problem solving by all the stakeholders;
- Implementing change as a learning process;
- Increasing opportunities for creativity and flexibility;
- Recognition of basic human needs;
- Restructuring costs and benefits to the various stakeholders;
- Minimising the stressors involved;
- Timely interventions and decision making.

This new concept of partnership will need to be embedded in the practice of all the stakeholders. This will require an educational process involving a range of interventions and the further development of procedural guidelines and role descriptions.