



APPENDIX 10

Outcomes - Analysis of Responses by Statement

46. Appropriate case outcomes weigh relevant issues such as physical capabilities, work history, mental abilities, interests, education, skills, and labor market conditions.

Two thirds all respondents (64%) rated this “Essential” and one third (33%) rated it “Important” for a total of 97%. Very few respondents (1.6%) marked that they “Disagree.”

More than half of the comments suggested additional factors that should be considered. A few others thought the list should be limited to legal requirements. Five of the six respondents who disagreed with the statement wrote comments. Three of these added factors to be considered and one said the current system does not adequately account for difficulty factors. Two said it would be too difficult to measure.

Total number of comments: 50.

Recommendation: This should be a key criterion. Defining an “appropriate” outcome for a case should depend upon factors in the case. How to assess the factors and outcomes should be a task given to the work teams.

47. VRC work meets legal requirements: it is supportable by the State Auditor’s Office and by L&I vocational professionals in the Vocational Dispute Resolution Office (VDRO) and Private Sector Rehabilitation Services (PSRS).

Almost two thirds all respondents (60%) rated this “Essential” and one third (34%) rated it “Important” for a total of 94%. A few respondents (3%) marked “Disagree.”

More than half of the comments said there are currently inconsistencies in interpretations among L&I staff and that decisions by the Board of Industrial Insurance Appeals (BIIA) are not predictable. Others mentioned a time lag issue between referral closure and a VDRO decision. Some said there is currently a punitive and adversarial relationship between

auditor and audited and this should be changed to a more constructive and educational relationship.

Total number of comments: 52.

Recommendation: VRC work should meet legal requirements, however requirements must be clearly defined, communicated and consistently interpreted between reviewers and reviewing bodies (PSRS, VDRO, BIIA) before a performance assessment system should be designed to incorporate these findings as a means of evaluating or rating VRCs. It is also recommended that the perception of an adversarial or punitive climate be explored. If another recommendation for creating a learning environment (in the “Values & Constraints” section) is adopted, these two situations would likely present a conflict.

48. Vocational services are cost-effective and add value to the claim management process.

There was an even split between respondents who rated this “Essential” (45%) and those rating it “Important” (44%), for a total of 89%. A few respondents (3%) marked “Disagree.” Employers and Self-Insured rated this higher than other groups.

Comments supported the concept and examples given often indicated that if the VRCs abided by “quality and effectiveness” criteria recommended in Section I, that vocational services would be cost-effective and value added. Some examples referenced other aspects of the system, such as medical management and revisions to rule or law, that, if modified could make the vocational process as a whole more cost-effective. Employer comments were similar and very supportive, and included comments about not engaging in less expensive short cuts that may create more expensive long term results. Many said that it would be important to define “cost-effective” and “value-added.” Most who said

they disagreed commented about the current system which they said was not cost-effective, indicating they would support this as a criterion. Some distinguished between cost-effective and value-added saying they are not always the same thing.

Total number of comments: 64.

Recommendation: This should be an important system goal, with an understanding that stakeholders generally care more that the vocational process adds value over the long run, by providing proactive, high quality services, than that the vocational process cuts costs in the short run. If the right criteria for “quality and effectiveness” are selected and monitored, then services provided by VRCs are likely to be perceived as value-added. There are also other elements of the vocational process that contribute to this system goal, such as medical management processes, that could be improved and may improve perceptions that the entire vocational system is a valuable investment.

49. Injured workers receive the benefits to which they are legally entitled.

More than two third of respondents (71%) rated this “Essential” and a quarter (26%) rated it “Important” for a total of 97%. Very few respondents (1%) marked “Disagree.” Injured worker/Labor and Private vocational providers rated this higher than other groups.

One third of the comments voiced straightforward support of this goal. The others, also supportive, provided ideas for improving the system in order to better meet this goal. One said, “This is the most important question in this survey.”

Total number of comments: 36.

Recommendation: This should be an important system goal but should not be included as criterion of a VRC’s performance. Building tests into key process steps to ensure that this occurs could serve to clarify both rights and responsibilities, reduce litigation costs and improve perceptions of the vocational system as a whole.

50. The primary goal of the system is to create sustainable outcomes. A sustainable outcome is a recommendation and adjudication that respects applicable statutes and rules, and where the injured worker experiences on-going economic sustenance without subsequent re-injury. Sustainable outcomes consider the facts of the case such as the injured worker’s physical capacities, work history, interests, labor market conditions, etc.

More than half of respondents (54%) rated this “Essential” and more than a third (36%) rated it “Important” for a total of 90%. A few respondents (4%) marked “Disagree.” Injured worker/Labor and Self-Insured rated this higher than other groups.

One comment summarized the goal as, “We aim to help injured workers get a good, safe job they can keep a while.” Although most comments supported this goal, respondents had differing opinions regarding “economic sustenance.” Some said statute and practices should be modified to support this and others felt it was too expensive or unrealistic. Several resisted holding VRCs solely accountable for these system outcomes. Some felt the injured worker should be held accountable, such as when they do not cooperate and/or they return to a job of injury (because of income or interest) and becoming re-injured.

Total number of comments: 73.

Recommendation: This should be an important aim of the system but should not be included as criterion of a VRC’s performance. One factor that could be monitored is whether case resolutions consider applicable factors in the case. Another element that could be monitored is to ensure rules and laws are followed. The criteria selected for “quality and effectiveness” could contribute significantly to this. Although finding gainful employment or on-going economic sustenance are currently not required by statute, the newly passed vocational legislation requires a study of the level of economic sustenance of workers after vocational services have been provided. Taken together, these elements could inform discussions about successes and opportunities of the vocational system as a whole.

51. It is widely held that L&I vocational services are effective, efficient and clear. They provide benefits only to injured workers who meet the benefit criteria.

Less than a third of respondents (32%) rated this “Essential” and more than a third (40%) rated it “Important” for a total of 72%. Many respondents (21%) marked “Disagree.” This was the highest portion of “Disagree” on the survey. Injured worker/Labor, medical providers, employers and L&I staff rated this lower than Private vocational providers or Claim managers.

Some comments said they believed it is important and true, but weren't sure if others would agree. Almost two thirds of the comments, most of whom marked "Disagree" thought that currently it is not a widely held belief, but it would be important, indicated they would support this as a criterion. Some said they supported one sentence but not the other. Some had specific ideas for how the system could be improved to come closer to achieving this.

Total number of comments: 80.

Recommendation: Perceptions that the system provides valuable services which are effective, efficient and understandable are important. It may be important to understand them and to use this information to improve the system. One challenge may be that perceptions can be based on accurate information about the system as a whole, on varying degrees of experience, and/or anecdotes that may, or may not, be accurate reflections of the whole. Other challenges may emerge when defining the terms and identifying the stakeholders to be surveyed.

52. Other Outcomes to consider

- Outcomes should result in significantly reducing the impact of injury (economic, physical, self-esteem, etc.) The individual should be restored to the community to the extent such is reasonable.
- Track the effectiveness of each vocational program. Follow up with those that graduate programs, are they employed in their field of training one year later, two years, three years, five years, etc.? Salaries one year, two years, three years later?

Recommendation: The newly passed vocational legislation requires a study of the economic situation of injured workers after vocational services have been completed. This could be used in assessing the effectiveness of vocational programs and the extent to which economic restoration occurs. Other aspects of restoration recommended by the first suggestion may need additional work to define what to measure and how to accurately measure it.

Some comments were about how to design the assessment methodology (e.g., measure things within the control of the VRC) and these are included in the “Values and Constraints” section.

Some comments were suggestions for legislative, rule or process changes and these will be forwarded to L&I management.