Limited English Proficiency in Workers’ Compensation

Language Preference and Non-Traumatic Low Back Disorders in Washington State Workers’ Compensation

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Key Findings

- Greater proportions of Spanish-language preferring (SLP) claims for non-traumatic low back disorders were accepted and resulted in lost work time compared to those of English-language preferring (ELP) claimants.

For compensable claims:

- SLP claimants had significantly different demographic, employment and occupational characteristics than ELP claimants.
- SLP claimants were more likely to have their claims protested by their employers.
- SLP claimants had greater time loss and claim costs, and had more physical therapy and vocational services provided during the course of care.
- SLP claimants received less back surgery.
- Time periods for benefits were no different between SLP and ELP claims, with the exception of time to first time loss payment.
- SLP and ELP claims had comparable permanent partial disability payments.

Impact

Spanish language preferring workers with non-traumatic low back disorders experienced different patterns of health care under workers’ compensation and had more costly claim outcomes than comparable English language preferring claimants.

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