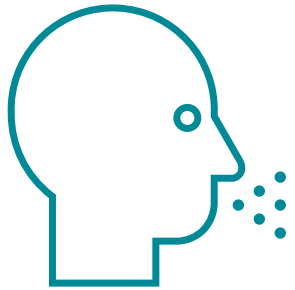
Workability and Long Covid: Challenges, Supports, and Experiences



GAGAN NAGRA, PHD (C)

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ACOEM GUIDANCE STATEMENT

Long COVID—ACOEM Guidance Statement

Gregg M. Stave, MD, JD, MPH, Ismail Nabeel, MD, MPH, MS, and Quentin Durand-Moreau, MD, MEd

Best Student Research Presentation

2023 *Work Disability Prevention and Integration* conference for a study on effectiveness of telerehabilitation

WORK

*Life is too short to **work** so hard.*

- Vivien Leigh

*There is no substitute for hard **work**.*

-Thomas Edison

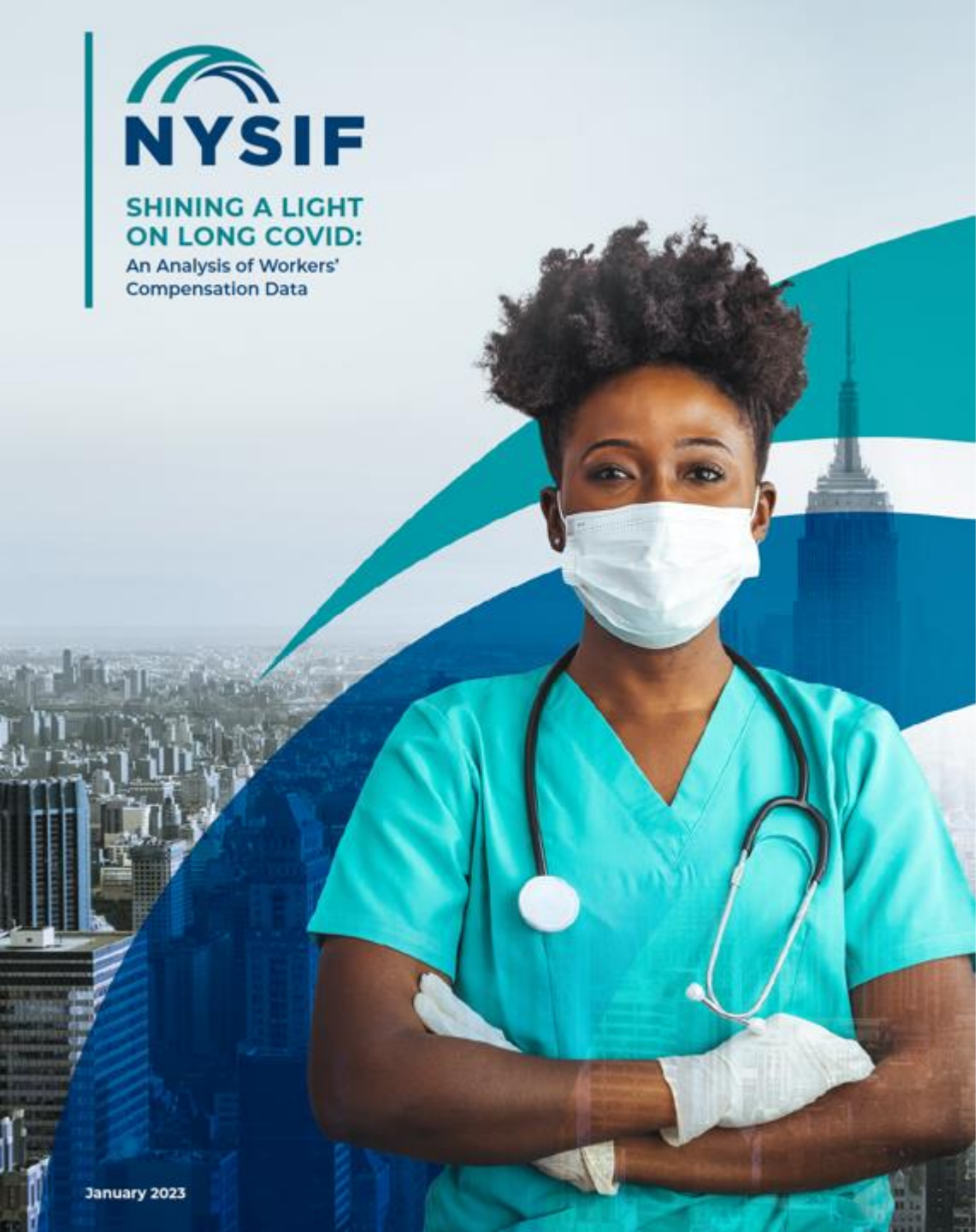
IS WORK GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING?

Gordon Waddell, A Kim Burton

Benefits of Work

- Work (paid or unpaid) is central to identity and social roles
- Work helps meet psychosocial needs
- Work can provide income

Employment and socio-economic status are primary drivers of gradients in health

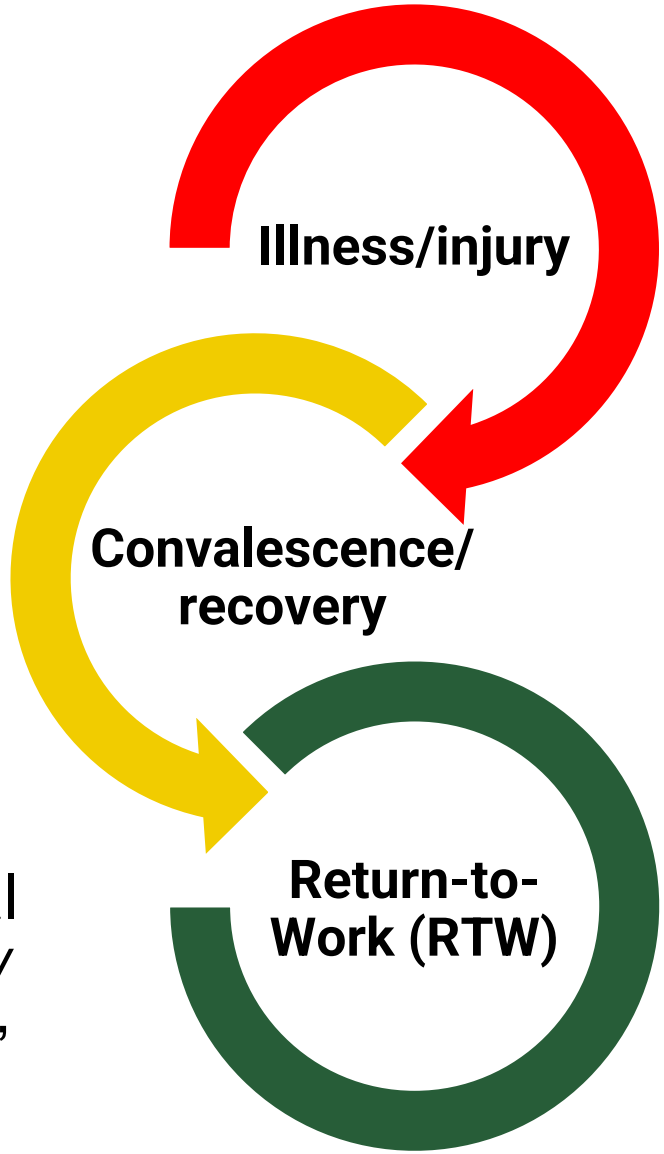


New York State Insurance Fund

Analysis of claims data between Jan. 1, 2020 and Mar. 31, 2022

- Of 3,139 claims, 977 involve Long COVID (**31%** prevalence)
- Prevalence fell sharply over time, inversely correlating with vaccination
- 18% unable to RTW for > one year

Prevailing Conceptualization



Medical "*Injury/ Illness*" model

Realities of Long COVID

- Episodic and fluctuating
- "Recovery" process unpredictable
- Invisible disability/ Non-specific
- Multiple interacting influences
- Physical, Cognitive, Emotional, etc.
- Post-Exertional Symptom Exacerbation

PAIN® 152 (2011) 204–211

PAIN®

www.elsevier.com/locate/pain

Workers' perspectives on low back pain recurrence: "It comes and goes and comes and goes, but it's always there"

Amanda E. Young [a,*], Radoslaw Wasiak [b], Leah Phillips [c], Douglas P. Gross [d]

[a] Center for Disability Research, Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety, Hopkinton, MA, USA
[b] Center for Health Economics & Science Policy, United BioSource Corporation – Europe, London, UK
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[d] Department of Physical Therapy, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

- Episodic and fluctuating
- "Recovery" process is unpredictable
- Invisible disability/ Non-specific
- Multiple interacting influences

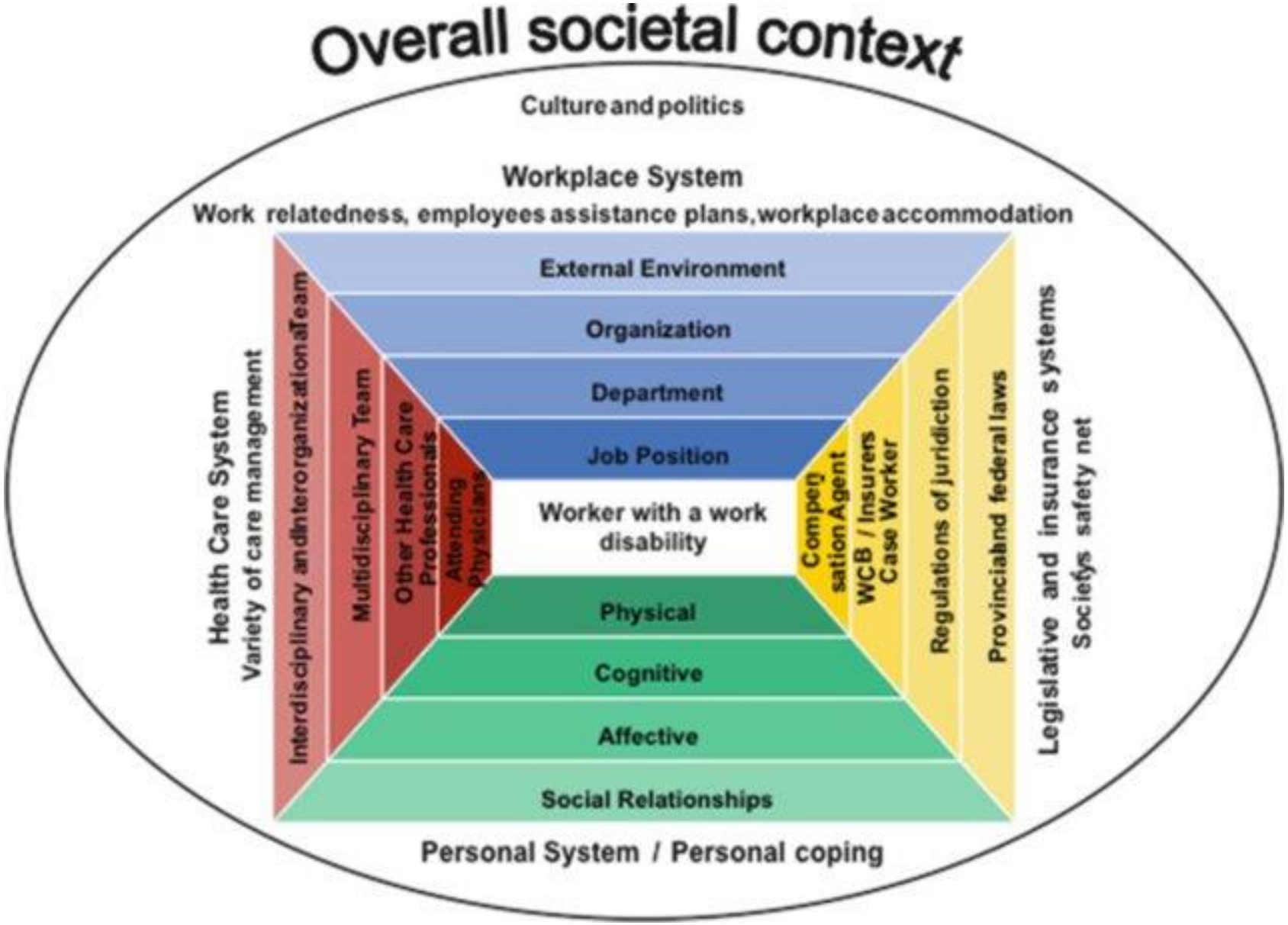
Cover of Pain, 152, 2011

Mark Halpin, artist

*“It’s a constant, it’s always there, and it’s a reoccurrence – **it comes and goes and comes and goes and comes and goes, but it’s always there**. Even the anxiety of it is always there.”*

Arena of Work Disability Prevention

- Multiple interacting systems
- Societal, cultural and political
- Diagnostically agnostic



Loisel, P. et. al. Prevention of work disability due to musculoskeletal disorders: the challenge of implementing evidence. *J Occup Rehabil*. 2005 Dec;15(4):507-24.

thebmj

PRACTICE POINTER

Work and vocational rehabilitation for people living with long covid

Rory J O'Connor,[1,2] Amy Parkin,[1,2] Ghazala Mir,[3] Jordan Mullard,[3] Sareeta Baley,[4] Jenny Ceolta-Smith,[5] Clare Rayner[6]

What you need to know

- Support patients to assess their current abilities at work compared with what they could do previously; they don't need to be 100% well to start the process of returning to work
- Going back to work too early after acute illness may be counterproductive; patients should not make hasty decisions around resignation or retirement in the early stages
- Use the fit note to help someone return to work, emphasising the need for flexibility to accommodate day-to-day fluctuations

PATIENT-ORIENTED RESEARCH

Background

POR integrates patient priorities and lived experience into research.

Injured/ill workers' voices are under-represented in RTW research, despite their central role.

OTs are well-positioned to lead POR given their client-centered practice and role in RTW.

Purpose

To identify key considerations for OTs engaging injured/ill workers as partners in RTW research.

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PATIENT-ORIENTED RESEARCH

Key Issues

Engagement of injured/ill workers in POR is not well described.

Challenges include power imbalances, communication barriers, fears of unemployment, and vulnerability.

OTs can act as knowledge brokers, facilitating collaboration and knowledge transfer.

PATIENT-ORIENTED RESEARCH

Conclusion

POR with injured/ill workers can reveal system strengths/limitations and improve services.

OTs can bridge research and practice, strengthening RTW outcomes through POR.

Nagra, G., Hung, P., Peters, M. R., Guptill, C., Ezeugwu, V. E., Cooper, L., McKeen, B., & Gross, D. P. (2025). Considerations for engaging in patient-oriented research with injured workers. *Frontiers in health services*, *5*, 1589643. https://doi.org/10.3389/frhs.2025.1589643

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A Scoping Review of Interventions and Recommendations for Enhancing Work Ability and Facilitating Return-to-Work in People with Long COVID

Synthesize evidence on return to work (RTW) interventions and recommendations for people living with Long COVID

Identify ‘promising’ approaches for enhancing work ability/RTW

Glenrose Hospital Foundation

Recommendations for RTW

Individualized Support

Tailored assistance considering unique needs and circumstances, with active involvement of the individual is crucial for a successful RTW.

Workplace Accommodations

Gradual and extended RTW process often required due to unpredictable COVID symptoms (*Job Accommodation Network – Long COVID*).

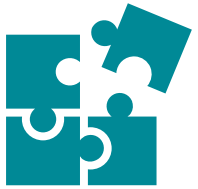
Critical Role of Managers

Supportive managers who actively listen and facilitate accommodations play a key role.

‘Promising’ Health Care Interventions

Timely Access to Safe & Supportive Rehabilitation

Multidisciplinary/Interdisciplinary or multimodal rehabilitation.



Program Components

Psychoeducational approach - pacing, breathing strategies, tailored physical activity, and medication management.

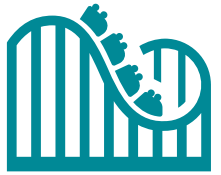
Intervention Duration

Ranged from 3 days to 5 weeks.

Precautions/Contraindications

Do not conduct performance-based Functional Capacity Evaluation with a history of Post-Exertional Symptom Exacerbation

If FCE is conducted assess **over multiple occasions** for exacerbation/ symptom flare



Do not conduct exercise-based, graded activity programs with a history of Post-Exertional Symptom Exacerbation/ Fatigue/ SOB

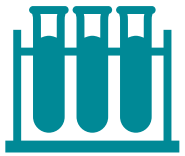
Ongoing Challenges

Ongoing confusion around nature of the condition

Within the general public and health care providers

Inconsistent policies nationwide

Within WCB and disability insurance systems



Lack of testing

Implications for WCB and disability insurance claims

Thank you

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Breathe Well Physio
Breathe Well Move Well Be Well

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