

Round Table Project on Safe and Timely Return to Function/Return to Work Phase I Report, May 1998

Executive Summary

Recent events have raised the profile of safe and timely Return to Function/Return to Work (RTF/RTW). In 1996, the Federal Government released *Equal Citizenship for Canadians with Disabilities: The Will to Act*. During the same year, the Auditor General identified as a key challenge for the Federal Government the impact of an aging population on the disability incidence rate and on the funding of the Canada Pension Plan.

In 1997, the Canadian Medical Association, with the support of the British Columbia Medical Association and the Yukon Medical Association, approved a return-to-work policy entitled, *The Physician's Role in Helping Patients Return to Work after an Illness or Injury*. The policy was based on documents approved by the Ontario Medical Association and the Alberta Medical Association on the role of the primary care physician in timely return to work. Other health care professionals have also been working towards better outcomes for their disabled patients.

The phrase 'safe and timely Return To Function/Return to Work' was coined during the development of the Ontario Medical Association policy on the issue in 1994. Return to Function refers to a return to life's activities and roles. The phrase 'return to work' was selected because it was flexible enough to encompass the traditional notion of work, paid livelihood, as well as evolving dimensions, such as part-time work and volunteering.

Although there have many positive developments during the past five years in safe and timely RTF/RTW, stakeholders involved in the process work typically in isolation. An informal review of stakeholders involved in safe and timely RTF/RTW indicated that they were ready to work together to develop a seamless, coordinated approach.

In 1997, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) identified two priorities related to RTF/RTW. One priority was to develop comprehensive employment supports for employees with disabilities. The second priority was to create collaborative external partnerships with stakeholders involved in safe and timely RTF/RTW to improve harmonization of program delivery for clients with disabilities. When Dr. Lisa Doupe, President of PWR Health Consultants Inc., contacted HRDC Ontario Region to discuss the implementation of the Round Table Project on Safe and Timely Return to Function/Return to Work, the initiative was considered consistent with the desired outcomes. Agreement to commence a project whose goal was a coordinated approach to safe and timely RTF/RTW was reached.

Objectives of Round Table Project, Phase one

The objectives of Phase One were to identify common stakeholder interests and opportunities to collaborate on safe and timely RTF/RTW as well as to develop a synopsis of policy positions with an analysis of common elements and gaps.

It is within this context that 23 representatives of organizations from various sectors involved in safe and timely RTF/RTW met for a Round Table discussion on April 3, 1998. The objectives of the meeting were to:

- become acquainted;
- learn about each other's roles in RTF/RTW; and
- identify opportunities to work together.

These objectives were met.

In addition, the Round Table process providing a forum for the exchange of information, and, as a result, created an opportunity to identify the key RTF/RTW priorities of the participants and encouraged the sectors to commit to ongoing dialogue.

As part of the process, the positions of 20 organizations on safe and timely RTF/RTW were examined through a review of available documents. The documents included formal policies, reports, brochures, presentation papers, and relevant portions of legislation, etc. that reference safe and timely RTF/RTW.

Stakeholder evaluation of the round table process

In their evaluations of the meeting and of the process, participants said the Round Table process on safe and timely RTF/RTW should continue. They said they liked the mix of stakeholders/observers present at the meeting, the discussion and the sharing of information. Invited to identify additional stakeholders who should be invited to the process, participants noted the absence of organized labour. (Labour groups were invited but were unable to attend.)

Report contents

This report includes:

- Background of the Round Table Project on Safe and Timely RTF/RTW;
- Overview;
- Introduction to Phase One of the Round Table Project;
- Methodology;
- Results of the Round Table Project, Phase One; and
- Recommendations and Next Steps.

This report represents a work in progress. Other phases of the project will continue the work started here, including the collection and analysis of stakeholder documents, on the topic of safe and timely RTF/RTW.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The following recommendations arose from Phase One of the Round Table Project:

- A second stakeholder Round Table meeting be planned; and
- The agenda build on the results of the first meeting and be focused on one or more of the next steps identified, i.e., the development of a vision, the development of a model and/or the development of a common language around safe and timely RTF/RTW.