



## **KINESIOLOGISTS AND WORKPLACE WELLNESS**

Every year, some 200,000 workers in Ontario file a claim for disease or injury with the WSIB.

In 2014, 5.4% of Canadians called in sick for chronic conditions and took an average of nine days off, compared to just two days off for those with an infectious disease. Also that year, 39% of WSIB's allowed lost-time claims concerned sprains and strains, while another 18% covered lower-back injuries. The costs of these injuries and chronic diseases are high. The Ontario Ministry of Labour estimated in 2007 that the direct and indirect cost to employers from a lost-time injury is roughly \$106,500. In 2012 alone, absenteeism cost the Canadian economy \$16.6 billion.

Registered Kinesiologists, Ontario's experts in the science of movement, can help reduce absenteeism, reduce claims and associated claims costs, return workers to jobs sooner and safely, reduce duration of claims and increase on the job productivity.

In Ontario, Kinesiologists are a regulated health profession delivering exercise therapy across a wide spectrum of patient profiles where exercise can improve health outcomes, preventing and managing injury, disability and over 25 chronic conditions including mental health. This means Kinesiologists integrate seamlessly into the health care system, confidentially sharing client information and working in multi-disciplinary teams.

This professional status should be made the most of by benefits providers to its fullest. The most progressive, comprehensive extended health care benefit packages include kinesiology. As such, referrals to Kinesiologists to deliver exercise-related therapy should be integrated into extended health benefits packages, and potentially within the workplace itself.

### **WHY A KINESIOLOGIST?**

Chronic conditions, especially mood disorders and back problems, are associated with substantial work productivity loss. Nationally, back problems account for \$621 million in workplace productivity lost, while mood disorders cost \$299 million and diabetes costs \$82.8 million.<sup>1</sup> Such chronic conditions, like heart disease, diabetes and arthritis, are associated with an increased probability of not being able to work due to health reasons, with heart disease being the greatest indicator of inability to work. These are more debilitating when comorbid: Combinations of heart disease with

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<sup>1</sup> Zhang W, McLeod C, Koehoorn M. The relationship between chronic conditions and absenteeism and associated costs in Canada. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment and Health*, Vol. 42 No. 5, 2016, 413-422.

diabetes, or of arthritis with back pain, are associated with greater likelihood of being unable to work than each condition is by itself.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond chronic disease, much of Canada's workplace injury burden is caused by musculoskeletal disorders. They account for about 40% of workers' compensation claims in Canada.<sup>3</sup>

These risks are not merely associated with high-risk occupations. Sedentary office work is also a risk factor. High levels of sedentary behaviour are a novel and important risk factor for many important chronic diseases, and they're associated with:

- A 112% increase in risk of diabetes;
- A 147% increase in risk of cardiovascular events;
- A 90% increase in risk of cardiovascular mortality; and
- A 49% increase in the risk of mortality from any cause.<sup>4</sup>

A Registered Kinesiologist can help mitigate these factors. Kinesiologists provide wellness, disease and injury prevention, and rehabilitation, all in one professional. As part of extended health benefits, kinesiology services can reduce disability claims, getting workers back on the job faster, avoiding expensive long-term disability claims.

Registered Kinesiologists perform Physical Demands Analyses to identify the essential tasks and physical demands of jobs that are useful tools in the identification of suitable work. They provide job coaching/shadowing to educate workers how to safely and effectively perform work tasks and/or return to function. They perform ergonomic assessments and work with employers, healthcare professionals and workers to ensure appropriate accommodation in the workplace including the development and implementation of return to work programs. And they develop and implement health and wellness programs to improve health and wellbeing of workers, reduce claims and associated claims costs and increase productivity.

A properly structured exercise program delivered by a Registered Kinesiologist can:

- Reduce risk of Type 2 diabetes by up to 58%;
- Reduce risk of stroke by up to 27%;
- Reduce risk of colon cancer by up to 40%
- Reduce risk of mortality and recurrent cancer by 50%;
- Reduce depression as effectively as pharmacological or behavioural therapy.

Physical activity programs can reduce the number of workplace injuries by 25%. Workers who are physically fit are not only injured less often, but they tend to heal faster, incurring less cost to the employer. Employees being regularly active can reduce the cost of workers' compensation by up to 45%.

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<sup>2</sup> Smith, Peter, Cynthia Chen, Cameron Mustard, Amber Bielecky, Dorcas Beaton and Selahadin Ibrahim. Examining the relationship between chronic conditions, multi-morbidity and labour market participation in Canada: 2000-2005.

<sup>3</sup> Institute for Work and Health. Reducing MSD hazards in the workplace: A guide to successful participatory ergonomics programs.

<sup>4</sup> Wilmoth, EG et al. Sedentary time in adults and the association with diabetes, cardiovascular disease and death: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Diabetologia*. 2012 Nov;55(11):2895-905.

Health Canada reports that employees' performance of their job duties can improve from 4% to 15% through regular participation in physical activity. Health Canada estimates that "A physically active person is 12% more productive than a sedentary person." As well, staff engaged in physical activity take 27% fewer days of illness. For instance, BC Hydro estimates that physical activity initiatives reduce the cost of sick leave by \$1.2 million annually. Toronto Metro "Fit staff" missed 3.35 fewer days of work in the first six months of a fitness program than those staff not enrolled in the program.

Fitness programs also help to stem employee turnover. The Canadian Life Assurance Company found that the turnover rate of staff who participate in fitness programs was 32.4% lower than the average rate of turnover over a seven-year period. BC Hydro found that employees enrolled in a company-sponsored fitness program had a 3.5% rate of turnover – well below their average turnover of 10.3%. At Toronto Life Assurance, turnover rate for staff in the fitness program was 1.5%, compared to 15% for non-participants. At Canada Life of Toronto, every dollar invested in exercise returned \$3.40 in terms of reduced staff turnover and increased productivity.

Overall, staff who engage in physical activity take between 14% and 25% fewer days of disability. Encouraging exercise can help to avert even small causes of absenteeism. Feeling healthy and doing physical activity reduces the risk of getting a cold by 50%, and it shortens its duration and symptoms by about 4 days. As well, the severity of symptoms is also reduced by 41% for people feeling healthy and 31% for people practicing physical activity.

Kinesiologists are best positioned to provide exercise-specific care through your extended health benefits program. Kinesiologists are experts in exercise and human movement, and specialize in helping patients develop and execute specialized exercise programs. As such, this service should be entrusted to those who are best qualified to deliver it.

There is broad consensus within the medical and public health communities that physical activity yields wide-ranging health benefits. Moreover, no other single intervention or treatment is associated with such a diverse array of benefits.<sup>5</sup> Those benefits should be made available through extended health benefits and workplace wellness programs in order to keep workers healthy and costs under control.

### **OKA'S Recommendations:**

1. *Integrate Kinesiology as part of extended benefits packages.*
2. *Incorporate workplace wellness programs guided by a Registered Kinesiologist into your workplace.*

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<sup>5</sup> Berra, Kathy, James Rippe and JoAnn E. Manson. Making Physical Activity Counseling a Priority in Clinical Practice. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 314.24 (2015). 2617-2618.

## **ABOUT THE OKA**

The Ontario Kinesiology Association is a non-profit organization representing approximately 1,500 members across Ontario. We are the formally recognized voice for Registered Kinesiologists in Ontario, one of Ontario's newest regulated health professions.

As authorities on movement and exercise, Registered Kinesiologists are committed to enhancing the quality of life of Ontarians through: physical activity, and workplace health and safety; the prevention and management of injury, disability and chronic disease; and the improvement of health and overall performance.

On April 1, 2013, Kinesiologists became a fully regulated health profession in Ontario under the Regulated Health Professions Act (1991). Ontario is a world leader in kinesiology. The first university degrees in kinesiology worldwide were granted at the University of Waterloo in 1970. Fifteen Ontario universities offer undergraduate kinesiology programs, granting upwards of 1,000 kinesiology degrees annually. Some of the best kinesiology research undertaken anywhere in the world is done at Ontario's universities.

Now, with regulated exercise professionals, the Government of Ontario has at its disposal the opportunity to significantly increase the role of exercise, exercise prescription and active therapies in the prevention and management of chronic disease, as well as disability, injury and chronic pain, in order to prolong independence in seniors, reduce dependence on pharmacological treatments and improve quality of life for all populations.