



Injury Schemes Seminar*

Balancing Outcomes

10–12 November 2013
Sheraton Mirage Gold Coast

* Formerly the Accident Compensation Seminar



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SYNOPSIS

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL COMPARISON OF COMPENSATION SCHEMES

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Key words: workers' compensation, work disability, prevention, benchmarking

Purpose of your paper: The purpose of our paper is to describe and compare the cumulative incidence of workers compensation claims in Victoria, Australia and British Columbia, Canada.

Synopsis: It is common practice for workers' compensation authorities to publish reports on the characteristics of accepted claims, return to work outcomes and client satisfaction. In Australia there is a regular benchmarking report produced by the national coordinating authority comparing outcomes between workers' compensation jurisdictions; however this report provides only statistical information on systems' performance.

Comparative studies across workers' compensation jurisdictions have the potential to assess and evaluate occupational health and safety and workers compensation system performance and improve the health and safety of workers in Australia and internationally. Results from comparative research are more powerful than those from single jurisdiction studies, as it is possible to control for scheme policy sources of variation that may be driving the findings and take advantage of natural policy experiments. Single jurisdiction studies attempt to do this using variation over time, but often temporal variation is confounded by other factors (e.g., technological change) or is too small for meaningful inference to be drawn. Comparisons between jurisdictions can provide more meaningful information on scheme performance and emerging health issues which require further attention.

In this paper we report preliminary results of the comparative pilot project on the workers' compensation claims data, extracted from the compensation system database of WorkSafe Victoria in Australia and British Columbia, Canada. Both countries have similar political, economic and demographic environments. The legislative and regulatory organization of worker's compensation schemes is broadly similar in both countries and it is based on no-fault publicly administered insurance; however there are substantial variations in policies and practices. For instance, in Victoria workers' compensation claims may be lodged once the employee has been off work 10 days or when a threshold level of medical expenses has been reached, while in British Columbia there is no minimum threshold for expenses or days off work.

This study sought to describe and compare cumulative incidence of claims per 1,000 employed workers in both jurisdictions. Since the coding of the occupations and injuries is different, the comparisons were performed across the similar type of occupation and injury in both jurisdictions. For this reason "nurses" and "truck and transport drivers" who sustained fractures at work, were chosen for this study.

All time-loss claims lodged by persons of working age (15–65 years of age) during a five year period (2006 to 2010) were extracted from workers' compensation administrative data in the state of Victoria, Australia and British Columbia, Canada. Descriptive analysis of claims by nature of affliction, bodily location, industry segment and occupation was undertaken. A cumulative incidence of claim



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rates per 1,000 employed workers was calculated at 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 30, 60, 90 and 180 days post injury. Given Victoria's minimum thresholds for days off work, the calculation of incidence of claim rates for Victorian injured workers starts at 10 days.

The results of this pilot study indicated similar overall injury rates and patterns in disability duration across same type of occupation and injury in both schemes. The apparent spike in claim rate at claim initiation in Victoria pointed out some system and structural differences between jurisdictions. The more detailed results and outcomes of this study will be presented during the seminar in November. At present, as per conditions of the data access policy in British Columbia, the results cannot be reported in this synopsis prior the institutional ethics approval for the study has been gained. The ethics application for the study is currently being considered and the findings expected to be available for public release as soon as possible.

The comparative studies identify areas for system and policy improvement across these two jurisdictions and presents many opportunities. For example, policy variations can aid in program and impact evaluation; learning across jurisdictions can lead to improvements in system efficiency and worker safety. Such studies also present a number of challenges, such as comparability across jurisdictions, differences in content, availability and access to the data. Next steps in our work will involve further research to describe occupational health and safety issues, impact of psychological injury and return to work outcomes across jurisdictions in Australia, New Zealand and Canada.