



SYNOPSIS

IMPLEMENTING AN HOLISTIC EVIDENCE BASED APPROACH TO PSYCHOLOGICAL INJURY MANAGEMENT

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Key words: psychological injury; prevention; health promotion; holistic support

Purpose of your paper: To discuss the implementation of an evidenced based psychological management process in emergency services, considering health promotion, training, diagnosis and occupational rehabilitation and re-deployment.

Synopsis: FRNSW have implemented a number of programs over the past 5 years that aim to decrease the number of psychological injuries, decrease the duration of workers compensation claims for psychological injury and improve the long term outcomes for injured workers. These interventions can be broadly placed into three categories; Health Promotion, Clinical Assessment and treatment/support. The programs have collectively delivered a decrease in claim numbers, claim costs and improved vocational outcomes for discharged firefighters. This paper will outline the full program and discuss in detail a number of the major initiatives.

The Australian RTW Monitor has consistently noted the importance of manager support when assisting those with sub-clinical and clinical psychiatric conditions. FRNSW engaged with Blackdog institute to collaboratively design and deliver the RESPECT program, which helped managers to be more confident in approaching their staff. Trained leaders demonstrated significantly improved skills and confidence, and there was decreased sick leave in the experimental groups. The FRNSW Peer team, who are trained to be aware of the support services available, suicide prevention, and basic counseling skills also provide support when changes in behaviour are noted.

Other prevention programs include: training in Mental Health First Aid; resilience program developed by the Blackdog institute for new recruits.

FRNSW has implemented a number of initiatives to ensure their team members receive evidence based best practice treatment. In relation to PTSD, consistent with the Expert Guidelines for PTSD, workers receive an assessment by a clinical psychologist which guides treatment consistent with the guidelines; the FRNSW PTSD book has been published and contains specific information for firefighters about management of PTSD; and a psychological resource is currently in development for practitioners who have been trained in the guidelines to improve outcomes.

The workplace has been identified as the best place to rehabilitate, and FRNSW have pulled together a comprehensive selection of work tasks with varying levels of stimulus to allow a graduated desensitisation to the workplace - home based tasks, station based tasks, exercise/fitness based tasks, computer training, full training, operational support, restricted operational tasks. FRNSW have also developed protocols for improving the vocational outcomes for psychologically injured firefighters. This is particularly important as leaving the role can have a negative psychological impact.