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Return to Work Coordinators - contributions to the occupational rehabilitation process for injured nurses

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Background. Occupational Rehabilitation is a managed process that involves a range of stakeholders. Return to work (RTW), coordinators are one such stakeholder. They are employees nominated by the employer to assist injured workers return to work in a safe and durable manner. Research suggests that RTW coordinators and return to work interventions have significant effects on disability outcomes, however, there is limited literature, both nationally and internationally, relating specifically to the current practices of RTW Coordinators. RTW coordinator's are at the forefront of the return to work process and are in an ideal position to describe the competing interests, organisational processes and local conditions that impact upon return to work for injured nurses.

Aim. This research aimed to explore the current practices, perceptions and experiences of workplace RTW coordinators when working with injured nurses.

Method. RTW coordinators from organisations in rural, regional and metropolitan geographical areas of NSW, who employ nurses were invited to participate in this study by mail. Interested persons contacted the researchers and were invited to attend a focus group being held in the local area. Twenty five RTW coordinators attended five focus groups, with public, private and aged care sectors being captured. The focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed. A series of meetings between the researchers were held, in which codes were developed according to a consensus process and informed by literature. These codes were used to analyse the transcribed data.

Findings. RTW coordinators identified a range of facilitators and barriers to return to work for injured nurses. This paper focuses on the organisational approaches to suitable duties and work accommodation.

Conclusions. Facilitators and barriers in the return to work process were identified both at an organisational and personal level, these will assist in informing practice and can inform future research into this area.