

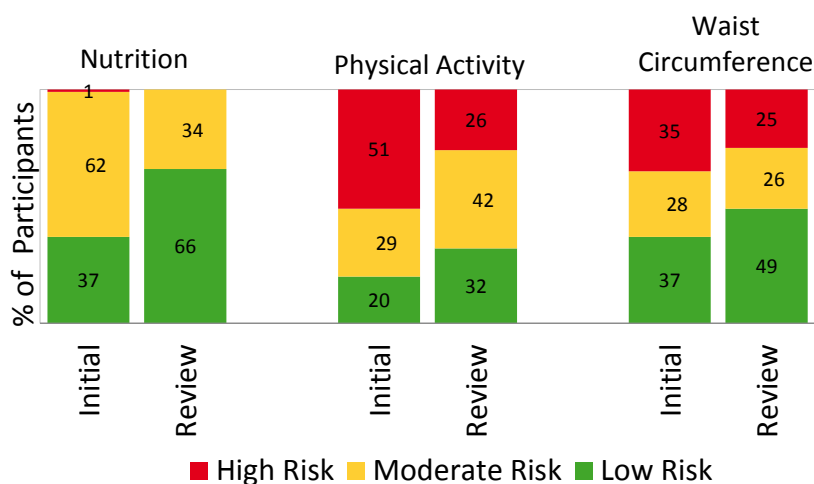
Occupational health initiative for management of staff absenteeism

Yarrabee Coal Company, Part of the Yancoal Group

The problem

Across 2012 to 2014 Yancoal Yarrabee and Corporate Bodies International (CBI) implemented the Yarrabee Health and Wellness Program. This program involved a variety of innovative and engaging site based initiatives targeting the risk factors prevalent within the Yarrabee workforce, as identified through individual Health Assessments (Nutrition, physical activity, overweight/ obese, blood pressure and HDL/Total Cholesterol ratio). Participants showed significant improvements across a range of risk factors (refer to image 1). Further to this, the program achieved a return on investment of \$3.80 for every \$1 invested, through improved presenteeism alone.

Image 1. Comparison of participants risk parameters between initial and review health assessments



In 2014 Yarrabee Coal Company sought to build on these results, specifically targeting injury rates and absenteeism: averaging a total recordable injury frequency rate (TRIF) of 30 and an overall absenteeism average of 12%. The ongoing consequences for site resulting from these factors included prolonged absence of skilled employees from the workplace, requirement for temporary engagement of new contracted workers (increase in operational risk), and increased requirement for skilled employees to work overtime to maintain safe operations. The indirect impacts of this high absenteeism were also extensive with an increased frequency of running site inductions by the Training department to accommodate an increase in new contractors required at site. There was a heavy reliance on existing workforce to complete training and familiarisation packages with new contractors. The absent worker was often self-managing medical treatment and care for the health condition away from site while management was often unsure on recovery time periods and

overall fitness for work of their absent worker. The Workers compensation impacts were costly.

The solution

Yarrabee Coal Company implemented a multi-facet occupational health management process that incorporated case management of all injuries / illness regardless of it being work related or non-work related.

All workers at site were encouraged to report any changes in health or health concerns to the site Paramedic. The site Paramedic would assess and manage the presentation within their scope of practice. In 2015 Yarrabee Coal Company sought to increase the treatment options available at site to provide efficient and effective treatment to the injured worker. The most successful treatment resource to date has been the utilisation of the pro-ice system which is a portable cold compression therapy system. The compression cryotherapy system follows the RICE principles by using specific cooling wraps along with an air bag that provides compression and ice cold water through to the injured area.

Over the past 11 months Yarrabee Coal Company has successfully used the pro-ice system on 18 different presentations ranging from a complete tear of an anterior talo-fibular ligament, meniscus strain and a gastrocnemius strain. The user friendly system allowed Yarrabee Coal Company to provide pro-ice training to the injured worker and they were able to take a pro-ice system home with them to maintain the treatment plan even while on rostered days off. Allocating a pro-ice machine increased the likelihood that the worker would consistently maintain their treatment plan while away from site improving the worker's compliance and recovery time.

For more complicated health presentations the site Paramedic would escalate the worker to the Health Advisor who would investigate further and seek to understand the full extent of the health complaint. The health conditions would vary and require individualised care plans ranging from developing suitable duty return to work plans, networking and/or coordinating medical specialist or allied health referrals and/ or maintaining a regular point of contact with the worker and the worker's department while the worker remained off site.

The implementation of monthly return to work case management meetings allowed the department managers to maintain up to date feedback about their worker, human resources were aware of leave entitlements and it also provided an opportunity to approximate return to work time frames allowing accurate forecasting of relief labour hire.

Yarrabee Coal Company implemented a reporting process for managing absenteeism which required the department supervisors to inform the Health Advisor when any workers had required sick leave equal to one full rotation off work I.E. for a "7 on 7 off" rosters the escalation would occur at 7 days whereas for a "5 on 2 off" roster the escalation would occur at 5 days.

The Health Advisor would follow up with the worker prior to the worker returning to site, helping to create a more supportive and understanding working culture. For most cases there was a requirement that the worker provide a medical clearance document to the Health Advisor that they were fit for work and able to complete their full and normal work duties. If the Health Advisor had any fitness for work concerns then the worker would be advised and if required referred to a medical advisor for a fitness for work assessment prior to the worker returning to site. Site personnel and supervisory teams were educated on the requirement for medical clearance and advised that failure to provide medical clearance would mean the worker would be unable to attend work. Another benefit is that it appears that the work culture is more supportive and understanding of the workers need therefore creating a work environment that is harmonious and inclusive.

Site Supervisors have been given the opportunity for individual mentoring sessions with the Health Advisor to increase their awareness of how general health and wellbeing of their worker can impact the workplace. This includes discussions around fitness for work, substance misuse, psychologically hazards such as bullying, working in isolation (away from family), emotional resilience and maintaining good health habits. This is an ongoing support option for Supervisors and available at their request.

Benefits / effects

The benefits/effects observed from 2014 to 2016 enabled Yarrabee Coal Company to reduce the TRIF rate from 30 to 4 and seen a reduction in the absentee rate from 12% to 3%. Workers Compensation premiums have reduced by approximately \$1.3M over a three year period.

The health management process remains transparent and reasonable. This process is consistently applied and is indiscriminate to the employed role, work area or origin of the health condition of the worker. Another benefit is that it appears that the work culture is more supportive and understanding of the workers need therefore creating a work environment that is harmonious and inclusive.

The individual worker is supported regardless of injury / illness being work related or non-work related. Workers are not hiding non-work related injuries and illnesses. The supervisors appear to be more confident in managing health / medical concerns and early communication permits Yarrabee Coal Company with the foresight to implement effective management strategies proactively rather than reactively.

Transferability

The implementation of the multi-facet occupational health management process can be transferable to any work environment within the resource industry. The process can be used and modified dependent on the requirements and strategic goals of the business.

Innovation

The originality for the implementation above involves the full application of the process rather than segments. Although individual concepts described above are consistent with best practice and Industry standards Yarrabee Coal Company has experienced firsthand the benefits of 360 degree implementation of a full and thorough Occupational health program.

Approximate cost

There are no specific out of pocket costs for the specific interventions. Each work area can determine the amount of resources required at their own sites such as Paramedics, pro-ice machine, EAP program, in house education programmes and RTW coordinators.