



March 6, 2015

Chair Holvey & Members of the House Committee on Business & Labor
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: House Bill 3026

Chair Holvey and members of the committee,

Oregonians who sustain serious work related injuries often experience more than the typical physical impact that are common work-related chronic musculoskeletal pain disability. They often also experience significant psychological impacts in response to dealing with these conditions which frequently interfere with rehabilitation and return to work efforts costing greater recovery time, increased claims costs, lost work productivity, and prolonged suffering to injured workers and their families.

House Bill 3026 regarding the establishment of a task force to study the need for and processes for providing counseling services of injured workers and to make recommendations for legislation regarding counseling services for injured workers.

Currently there is a significant reluctance on the part of worker's compensation insurers to provide counseling services out of fear that conditions, such as depression or anxiety will become part of the accepted conditions related to the injury and cause greater claims exposure and never-ending claims costs and efforts.

A study by Jeffrey Dersh, Ph.D. and colleagues studied 1,595 patients with worked related disability who had been out of work for a minimum of 4 months. Sixty-four percent of them were experiencing a mood disorder in contrast to 15.4 percent of the general public.

A second recent study by Abay Asfaw, Ph.D and Kerry Souze, Ph.D., of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention focused more narrowly on what depression in a study of some 440,000 employees for 16 large employers nationally. They found that in the three-month periods following an injury, injured workers were 44 percent more likely than non-injured to have had an outpatient visit for depression. This reflects a 63 percent higher cost according to the authors.

When psychological conditions, such as depression, are present, unless adequately treated it can be a negative predictor of success, particularly when associated with other conditions such as physical musculoskeletal injuries and chronic pain.



Unfortunately within the worker's compensation system, treatment is difficult to obtain because it is often denied by insurers who are fearful of greater costs and claims exposure. However, treating these conditions earlier and effectively can result in reduced time and ultimately claims costs.

The development of a task force to further study the issue of providing short-term focused counseling to reduce the emotional impact of work related injuries and reasonable solutions are an excellent first step in address this long-term concern by injured workers, their families, employers and the medical and psychological providers. Passage of House Bill 3026 would offer an opportunity to more fully examine the issue and begin a process of addressing concerns for Oregonians who experience work related injuries.

The Oregon Psychological Association (OPA) has reviewed House Bill 3026. We are in support of House Bill 3026 and would offer an OPA member who is knowledgeable in treating injured workers to serve on the Task force to further study the issues and develop recommendations for the Legislature regarding counseling services of injured workers.

OPA supports House Bill 3026 and respectfully requests that the committee vote to pass.

Sincerely,
Mike Leland, Psy.D.