

ACC News

» A newsletter for health care professionals

» MAY 2007 – ISSUE 101

ACC and research

ACC's commitment to reducing injury in New Zealand relies to a large extent on having access to relevant and up-to-date information – on trends, patterns and behaviours and on evidence-based best practice both here and overseas.

With this in mind, we make significant investments in research – by funding (through a tendering process) new research from external providers and undertaking our own reviews of existing research to provide an evidence base for the New Zealand context. The aim is always to gain new knowledge and understanding and to apply it to developing and improving our policies and programmes – whether they relate to injury prevention, rehabilitation or general scheme performance.

The research is often undertaken in joint funding initiatives with other organisations, particularly the Health Research Council, and through multi-agency projects such as Youth 2007 – a national, whole-of-government survey of adolescent health and wellbeing that aims to build a long-term picture of youth health and development and track current and emerging health issues.

“Our recently launched research and development strategy recognises the importance of proactive research to ACC's future,” says Jackie Fawcett, ACC's Manager, Research Services. “We need the knowledge that research gives us to guide our work, measure our performance against international schemes and ensure we provide world-class services to our claimants and treatment and rehabilitation partners.”

Examples of recent and imminent research projects include:

- » an evaluation of the tai chi falls prevention programme for elderly people
- » the ongoing development of injury treatment and management guidelines by the New Zealand Guidelines Group, such as the burns guideline that is soon to be released
- » research into work-related vehicle injuries and the behaviours and injury experiences of newly licensed drivers
- » with the Health Research Council and the Department of Labour, a major research study of the epidemiology of, and interventions for, noise-induced hearing loss (a growing area of claims to ACC, which covers work-related hearing loss)
- » a study of the links between home hazards and the rate and seriousness of slips, trips and falls in the home.

ACC is also helping to build research providers' capability through programmes such as our career development awards, which are funded by ACC and managed by the Health Research Council. These awards provide scholarships to support candidates undertaking Masters and PhD programmes and to fund post-doctoral students undertaking theses and research in the fields of injury prevention and rehabilitation. Later in the year, ACC will also be undertaking a contestable funding round for new research, offering researchers the opportunity to submit their own ideas for consideration.

In future issues of ACC News we'll bring you updates of research planned and underway. If you have any questions or ideas in the meantime, please contact Jackie Fawcett on 04 918 4439 or by email at jackie.fawcett@acc.co.nz.

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Claimants with medication-causing dry mouth

Xerostomia (dry mouth) is a common side effect of some medications that can lead to oral health problems such as caries.

If you have a patient taking these medications for an ACC-covered injury – or if you prescribe the medication yourself – it's of considerable value to take a proactive, preventive approach to the potential problems before they become the subject of an ACC claim. This means educating your patient on the possible side effects of the medication, explaining the importance of effective oral health care and suggesting preventive techniques such as fluoride baths (note ACC may be able to help with providing these).

Should your patient make a claim for caries or other oral health problems, please note that ACC considers each claim on a case-by-case basis, taking careful account of the claimant's past dental history and their oral health status at the time of their injury.

Newsletter for sensitive claims treatment providers

ACC's Sensitive Claims Unit provides cover and entitlements to claimants who have suffered a mental injury (such as depression) that has developed as a direct result of sexual assault or sexual abuse. Services range from treatment (ie. counselling) to social and vocational rehabilitation and are provided under Regulations or, for some services, through contractual agreements.

Treatment providers for claimants with sensitive claims (such as counsellors) can keep in touch with the latest news from the Sensitive Claims Unit via a monthly newsletter available at www.acc.co.nz/scp-newsletter.

The newsletter covers news from the Unit, new developments that may affect service delivery, and solutions to common operational issues.

If you'd like to receive the newsletter, please send your email address to info-sensitive-claims@acc.co.nz or phone 0800 735 566.

New Maori community agreements signed

Since we announced in the last issue of ACC News the landmark signing of a relationship agreement with the Far North's Te Korowai Trust, four more have been signed – with Ngati Hine Health Trust in Whangarei on 4 April, Te Whanau o Waipareira Trust in Henderson, West Auckland on 11 April, Raukura Hauora o Tainui in Huntly on 12 April and Te Matarau in Tauranga on 2 May. A sixth agreement will be signed with Taranaki Whanui at Waiwhetu Marae in Lower Hutt on 22 May.

The agreements are part of ACC's Maori Access Strategy and a commitment to building relationships with Maori by working through grassroots organisations well known in Maori communities. They demonstrate our focus on people, taking us one step closer to meeting the needs of Maori we serve in the wider community.

Work detail sheets updated

The work detail sheets that occupational assessors use for reporting on IOAs (initial occupational assessments) and VIOAs (vocational independence occupational assessments) have been updated and will be available at www.acc.co.nz from 31 May.

The sheets have been available online since 2003, providing occupational assessors with an organised and accessible source tailored for use in IOA and VIOA reports.

The sheets were originally based on the New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, 1999 and have been updated to reflect the new Australian New Zealand Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO), launched in September 2006.

New vocational rehab liaison group

ACC's Rehabilitation Service Development Unit is establishing a new 'Vocational Rehabilitation Provider Liaison Group' to encourage discussion on the scope and development of vocational rehabilitation strategies.

The Group is likely to comprise representatives of provider sectors or key provider organisations, with calls for nominations being made through the professional bodies.

The inaugural meeting will be held on 7 June in Wellington, with subsequent meetings held quarterly. For more information, please contact Andrea McLeod (Manager Rehabilitation Services, Longer Term Programmes) on 04 918 7416 or send an email to andrea.mcleod@acc.co.nz.

Contact details:

Emailing dental electronic X-rays and photos

ACC is encouraging all dentists to send their electronic or scanned X-rays and photographs by email. Not only is this fast and easy, it also makes it easier for us to transfer your images to claimants' records.

There are two email addresses available:

- for the Hamilton Dental Unit: HnDental@acc.co.nz
- for the Dunedin Dental Unit: DnDental@acc.co.nz.

Note these email addresses can't be used to lodge patient claims. An eLodgement facility is currently being developed and trialled, and we'll let you know when it's available.

Short notes

Cultural capability workshops for ACC staff

With the aim of improving our relationships with Maori, Pacific and Asian peoples, ACC's Maori and Community Relations team is running a number of workshops for ACC staff throughout the branch network. The workshops focus on ensuring culturally appropriate conversation skills, especially when explaining what we can and can't do for claimants.

Writing a report for ACC?

If you've been commissioned to write a report for ACC – for example as the result of an assessment – we really appreciate it when you complete and send the report to us promptly. The sooner we receive your report, the sooner we can act to review your recommendations and provide the claimant with the treatment and rehabilitation they need.

Return to work – and working with employers

ACC is committed to helping people return to work safely after an injury. As a treatment provider, you play a pivotal role. Following the release of our 'Return to Work Guide' last year, here's a quick reminder of some of the things you can do to help make this happen.

When you're completing an ACC45 or ACC18 with a patient, it's important to gather accurate information on their workplace. This includes the correct name of their employer as well as the options for their return to work – whether they can continue normal work hours and duties, return to work on suitable selected duties, or require time off work while they recover.

You may find you get all the information you need from your patient. However, if you need more information there are a few options available to you:

- With your patient's consent, you can contact the employer. They may be able to provide additional insights that can help you to make more informed decisions. For example, the employer may be able to offer suitable alternative duties of which the employee isn't aware.
- From an employer's perspective, it's important to have clear information on an employee's ability or limitations, as this helps them to determine potential suitable duties. Therefore, providing this information on the medical certificate is very helpful.
- If you or the employer have some concerns about the person's ability to return to work, ACC can contract an independent provider to complete a work site assessment, to determine the person's ability and safety when returning to work.
- If you'd prefer, you can speak to your patient's claims manager about liaising with the employer on your behalf.
- If you notice some employers are repeatedly resistant to your return to work suggestions, you may like to speak to your Provider Relationship Manager about a referral to our Employer Injury Management team. The team works with employers to help build their capability to support return to work, including exploring options of potential suitable duties for injured employees.

Note that any certification must be based on your patient's functional ability or limitations. If you certify your patient unfit for work because there is no suitable work available, we can't undertake any form of rehabilitation, thus potentially prolonging the duration of the claimant's incapacity or their ability to return to pre-injury employment. If you're ever in doubt, please contact us.

Prevent and manage pain, discomfort and injury in your workplace

As a health professional, you need little introduction to the existence of work-related discomfort, pain and injury.

It's common across workplaces, but especially those where employees must perform strenuous tasks – a typical requirement in the health profession.

Fortunately, our understanding of the factors that contribute to work-related discomfort, pain and injury – and measures we can take to mitigate them – has advanced considerably in recent years.

Taking advantage of this, ACC has developed a range of resources, aimed at reinforcing preventive and management measures you can adopt in your workplace.

The resources are designed to complement your overall health and safety management strategy, and help you avoid the costs and disruption that would likely result if either you or an employee suffered an injury at work.

The resources include:

Warm-up and stretch posters – By displaying these in frequently used areas, you can promote simple, effective exercises to perform before and after physical tasks and during breaks, to reduce the risk of injury. To order posters, phone 0800 844 657 and quote numbers ACC2292 and ACC2293.

Work Smart Tips-Health version – A web-based program that enables you to create fold-out, wallet-sized cards featuring a range of safety information, which can be customised to suit your workplace. You can include everything from stretches and exercises to return-to-work programmes. To create and print workplace Smart Tips for you and your workers, go to www.acc.co.nz/worktips.

'Implementing a Health and Safety System for Residential Care' course – This course is aimed at managers, or those with responsibility for health and safety in the workplace, and can be delivered as either a full-day workshop or two separate modules. The course focuses principally on hazard management and incident investigation. For details about the next course in your area, phone 0800 844 657.

HabitAtWork – A website providing comprehensive information about discomfort, pain and injury in the workplace. Explore the myths and realities of discomfort, pain and injury, and view advice on how to work in comfort and avoid pain. Visit www.habitatwork.co.nz or, if you would like it on your Intranet, call 0800 844 657 and order a CD by quoting number ACC2288.

All of these resources are provided free of charge, so please – take advantage of this opportunity to avoid discomfort, pain and injury and reinforce employee wellbeing in your workplace.

