

**Successful return to  
work programming for  
Long Covid February 2023**



## Our Vision

To achieve altogether better health for all, in every community across Aotearoa.

## Our Purpose

We support people in their communities to optimise health and live their best lives.

*Altogether better health  
for your best life*



120 sites across the country



800 staff and many more contractors across:

- Physiotherapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Psychology
- Counselling
- Occupational Health Nursing
- Health Navigators
- Health Coaches
- Dietitians
- Medical Specialists



6000+ employers, ACC and individuals

## What is Vocational Rehabilitation?

- Interdisciplinary team support for return to function, focussed on work
- Assessing Job tasks from a physical, cognitive and emotional perspective
- Identifying barriers, limitations, and opportunities
- Plan formulation – graduated return to work
- Implementation, monitoring and fine tuning



## Key to success

- Engaging early!
- Accommodation
- Awareness: understanding the full picture: background, current, future
- Recognising the client as an individual
- Effective communication
- Health and Wellness Support: Physiotherapy, mental health support, nutrition and wellness resources, cultural support

## Optimal Employee Journey and wellness ecosystem

- Pre employment screening
- Annual Health Monitoring
- Health and Safety Initiatives
- Wellness focus
- EAP Services
- Workplace Assessments / Task Analysis
- Early Intervention programmes
- Injury Management

## Case Study – a common example

- Diagnosed with covid in July '22
- 6 months of persistent chest pain, nerve pain at a previous surgical site, fatigue, breathlessness/cough and poor sleep.
- Complicated medical history with previous Ca, pre diabetic, reflux and Arthritis.
- @ First appointment working 9-12noon. Then needed to sleep. Poor exercise/activity tolerance with elevated heart rate, breathlessness, chest pain and fatigue.





## Case Study – Outline of programme

- Pacing advice and education for home and work
- Education of energy systems of the body
- Dietitian input with focus on fatigue and decreased physical activity
- Exercise review: periodised plan and education incl. work demands
- **Breathing techniques, advice and education**
- Goal: to be able to return to work without breathlessness – maintain talking while standing, present confidently.

## Case Study – RTW plan

- Managing symptoms – Work hours initially remained at 3 per day
- Removal of afternoon sleep – replaced with breathing exercises and relaxation techniques
- Addition of light afternoon activity
- Balance of increasing work hours and exercise tolerance (grouped)
- Breathing exercises progressed to standing with focus to control breathing while talking
- Over 8 weeks work hours are now 8.30 to 4pm (1 hour less than pre Covid)



## Action Points

- Recognise that return to work within COVID-19 and other presentations is complex!
- Engage early
- Vocational Rehabilitation has clear ROI (90% +)
- EAP Services with a wellness and movement health focus has an additional benefit
- **By working together employers and employees can help ensure safe and successful return to work for those with long COVID.**



# Thank you!

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