RISK MANAGEMENT
INSIGHTS

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Workstation Design and Workers' Comp Claim Prevention

For law firms, where staff typically spends a lot of time working at their computers, the risk of musculoskeletal disorders and resultant workers' compensation claims are high. Assessing and addressing workstation design is important in preventing such problems.

Keyboard design and positioning has long been considered the primary cause of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and related disorders, but these types of musculoskeletal disorders are likely caused by a combination of factors, including furniture, office design, software, equipment and training, all of which constitute workstation design.

A thorough assessment of your firm's workstations should consider the following:

Furniture: Chairs and all of the furniture in a workstation should fit the individual's body type and strength. Look for furniture manufacturers who incorporate valid ergonomic principles into their design, offer easily adjustable furniture and provide instructions for properly using and adjusting their products.

Office Design: Proper lighting and acoustic design help minimize strain. Computer screens and computer placement should reduce glare. Proper space planning can facilitate collaboration, task allocation and privacy concerns, all of which may factor into how employees utilize their workstations.

Software: Software programs are available to run in the background of a computer that will monitor how much time the user has spent on the computer and pop up reminders to take rest breaks and to perform some simple exercises to minimize strain.

Equipment: Purchasing adjustable office equipment helps an employer accommodate all employees, including those who are left handed, have impaired vision or who are of above- or below- average height, among other things. Also consider supplying foot rests, document holders and wrist rests to further reduce worker strain. Make sure all equipment is positioned according to manufacturers' recommendations.

Training: Make sure your workers understand how to properly operate the equipment and furniture you provide. Workers should also rest their eyes periodically and take time to do a few simple stretching exercises. In addition to implementing ergonomic strategies, the employer must carefully monitor the strategies for effectiveness.

Firms may choose to work with ergonomists and safety consultants to assess, restructure and review their workstation designs. Your current insurance carrier may offer workstation design training (including webinars, DVDs, web assistance and more). Documenting the workstation assessment process and resulting modifications and monitoring can provide good faith evidence should a workers' compensation lawsuit be levied against an employer for an employee's musculoskeletal injury.

In addition to assessing your workplace, we suggest you also conduct a review of your workers' compensation insurance to ensure you and your employees are properly covered and well protected in the event of a workers' compensation claim.

Utilizing the tools available to properly evaluate your law firm's workstations will help ensure that your firm has provided a safe and healthy environment to protect employees against work related injuries.

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