

## Nurse Case Management: Providing Targeted Interventions to Ensure Appropriate Medical Care and Facilitate Return to Work

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In the last *PMA Executive Briefing*, I discussed the important role of early intervention, or triage, as part of a managed care program for workers' compensation claims. By initiating a proactive response at the earliest, most critical point of a claim — within days of its outset — we identify the key risk factors that may impact the claim. We then set a plan to ensure the injured worker receives the appropriate level of care.

### **Adding Medical Expertise to the Claims Team**

Following triage, a case manager may be assigned to manage a worker's care throughout the recovery process. Ideally, registered nurses serve as case managers. These specialist nurses have a high level of both medical and workers' compensation expertise. They are specialists trained to assess how the injured worker's treatment is progressing and determine if intervention is needed.

The case manager monitors and manages the care according to the plan established by the injured workers' physicians and clinical benchmarks, based on evidence-based clinical outcomes and protocols. They also ensure the injured worker's care is in compliance with specific state jurisdiction protocols related to medical management.

The case management process helps ensure the injured worker receives the most appropriate and effective care and can return to work as soon as possible, thus reducing the duration and cost of the claims.

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### **Targeted Intervention**

A critical role of the nurse case manager is identifying when recovery is not progressing according to plan and making targeted interventions to help workers get back to work faster.

The process begins during triage when "intervention triggers" are established. This planning enables case managers to promptly identify when intervention is needed and the necessary resources to keep the claim progressing in a positive direction.

**Case management works best when it is a collaborative process between the case manager, medical providers, injured worker, claims adjuster and employer.**

These triggers may include:

- Co-morbid conditions that are affecting the expected progress in recovery
- Treatment that is not producing expected results
- Psychosocial factors that create negative incentives for the injured worker to stay out of work
- Non-compliance by the injured worker with the recommended care
- Communication barriers between the worker and medical providers
- Unexpected change in a worker's condition

By identifying interventions at the point in time when they are required, case managers can help ensure the injured worker recovers faster and returns to work sooner.

**Interventions can be used to:**

- Communicate the injured worker's medical progress to the employer to facilitate the development of a return-to-work plan
- Educate the injured worker regarding the importance of complying with all phases of treatment
- Work with the physician to pursue alternate forms of treatment when the injured worker's recovery is not progressing

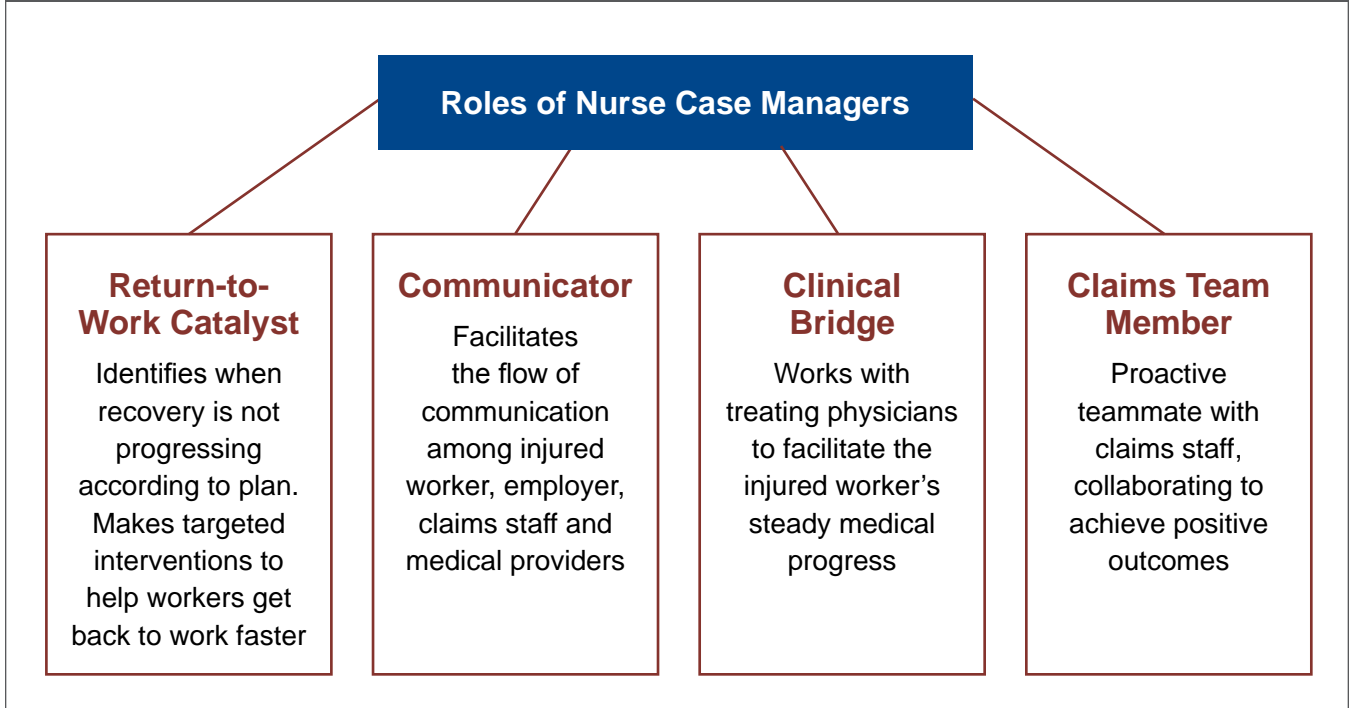
**Collaborative, Integrated Process**

Case management works best when it is a collaborative process between the case manager, medical providers, injured worker, claims adjuster and employer. Nurse case managers play a critical role on the team. Their clinical background enables them to serve as an effective bridge with physicians on medical issues impacting the claim. The case manager ensures a continuous flow of communication among everyone, thus promoting quality care, cost-effective interventions and better outcomes.

Case management service can be delivered through a blended approach that combines telephonic and field (in-person) presence. Carefully utilizing each strategy when it is most appropriate can reduce the cost of case management services.

For catastrophic claims, specialized case management is necessary to assess injuries within 24 hours of the incident and provide access to specialized treatment and facilities.

Case management also should be integrated with other managed care functions, such as bill review and pharmacy management, two functions that will be discussed in more detail in future **PMA Executive Briefings**.



PMA Companies series of **Executive Briefings** explores the strategies necessary to effectively manage medical costs of workers' compensation claims today. These include integrated occupational

health and wellness, early intervention, case management, bill review, pharmacy management, narcotics utilization and physician dispensing.

**About the Author**

**John Santulli, Executive Vice President, PMA Companies**, leads PMA's customer-focused service functions all integrated under a single umbrella including Claims, Managed Care, and Risk Control Departments and third-party administrators PMA Management Corp. and PMA Management Corp. of New England. With over 30 years of workers' compensation expertise, Mr. Santulli has held leadership positions in the field as well as key operational departments such as underwriting, distribution management, claims and services across PMA. A graduate of Gettysburg College, he has a Chartered Property Casualty Underwriting (CPCU) designation.