

## ***"I Will Never Get Injured on the Job; I Will Never Have to Deal With the WCB"***

If you believe that, well, good luck to you. We hope you never will. Nobody plans to get hurt at work: to have an accident, stumble while carrying equipment, get exposed to toxic gases or suffer a psychological trauma that scars you for the rest of your life. But if you do have the misfortune to be hurt on the job or develop an occupational disease, you WILL have to deal with the WCB (aka WorkSafeBC although that is their marketing name – they are still legally the Workers' Compensation Board.)

You could be in for a difficult and miserable time dealing with the WCB, but there are a few steps you can take right now to minimize the grief.

**You need a doctor, a steady doctor,** not just whoever you get at a walk-in clinic. If you have a regular doctor he/she is more likely to stick up for you if you are getting bullied by the WCB. A doctor who has been seeing you for years knows you and your medical history. They know if you are generally healthy and if you only show up when you are really sick. They know if you've had prior back complaints or headaches or complaints of any kind. Walk-in clinic doctors are less likely to fill out the forms in sufficient detail and they are unlikely to remember you if they have not made good chart notes. You would not believe how many injured workers have been shafted over the years because they didn't have a doctor who would stand up for them. Take it from us; it makes a **huge** difference. Now is the time to find yourself a good family physician and stick with him or her. They can make a big difference in your life when the time comes. Once you are sick or injured it's going to be very difficult to change.

Here are a few examples of situations we have dealt with where having or not having a regular doctor has made a crucial difference to the worker.

**Forms!!!** Whether it is WCB, LTD, WI or CPP Disability, you often have to ask your doctor to fill in the paperwork. You are much more likely to get these forms quickly and containing appropriate detail if you have a good regular doctor.

**Familiarity with your history.** If you have a longstanding and complex history of injury or occupational disease, do you really want to have to re-visit your whole medical history every time you go into a clinic? Aside from the fact that no walk-in clinic doctors are going to be willing to give you that extra time, it's unlikely that you would be able to provide a complete and accurate background every time anyhow. In one case the dispute involved when the worker had first seen his doctor. He had seen a doctor in the clinic who did not make any chart notes of the visit, nor did she remember that visit several months later.

**Knowing the worker.** The WCB may use it against you if you have been in to see the doctor about something else, unrelated to your compensable injury. They don't acknowledge that if your back has been bad for years, you are not going to go in every month to see your doctor when he/she has told you there is nothing more they can do. The WCB will argue that if you were really in pain you would have been in to see the doctor. A longstanding family doctor is more likely to know you and may be more willing to add to a report that while he/she saw you for pneumonia or a non-compensable injury or illness, he/she was aware that you continued to suffer from your "bad back" or whatever the case may be. They are also in a better position to say if your condition has "flared-up" or deteriorated, thus giving you grounds for a reopening. An unfamiliar doctor can only repeat that you have told him/her that you are feeling worse, and that's not worth much.

**Return to work.** A few years ago the WCB removed the policy that required them to get the family physician's agreement before sending someone back to work. The policy now says that they should "consider" the family physician's opinion, but they don't have to follow it. In this case, it's really important to have a doctor who will strongly express his or her opinion on whether you are fit to return to work and to what light duties.

**Psychological diagnosis.** The amount of time it takes a doctor to go through the depression questionnaire or any other mental health test, in order to be able to make a psychological diagnosis, is much longer than a walk-in clinic doctor will probably be willing to take. Your longstanding family physician will generally be more willing to take the extra time.

**Follow-up.** Sometimes a family physician will phone the WCB in order to try to get you treatment or referral to a specialist. It may take a long time to get a call back. A recent appeal had the worker's family physician asking for a call back from the Board on 19 November 2015. A board medical advisor finally called on 11 January 2016. By that time it seemed that the walk-in clinic doctor didn't really care anymore. She never called the board medical advisor back.

These are just a small sampling of the ways that having or not having a family physician can make a difference if you are ever injured or get sick on the job.

Don't wait until you are sick to look for a good doctor. **Find one now.** You will be glad you did.

Sarah O'Leary

Rush Crane Guenther, Barristers & Solicitors

300 - 111 Water Street, Vancouver BC V6B 1A7

Tel: 604.687.5611/Fax: 604.681.0912 , E-mail: [so@rcga.com](mailto:so@rcga.com)