

2019-01-01

## Supervisor's roles and responsibilities in preventing prolonged disability in workers with musculoskeletal disorders

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### Citation recommandée

Nastasia, I., Coutu, M.-F., Gaspard, S., Rives, R. et Quilicot, A. (2019, 2-5 septembre). *Supervisor's roles and responsibilities in preventing prolonged disability in workers with musculoskeletal disorders* [Affiche]. PREMUS 2019, the 10th International Scientific Conference on the Prevention of Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders: From research to evidence based sustainable interventions and practices, Bologne, Italie.

# Supervisor's Roles and Responsibilities in Preventing Prolonged Disability in Workers with Musculoskeletal Disorders

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## Introduction

Even if many studies mention supervisors' role as important factor in preventing prolonged disability among workers after work-related musculoskeletal injuries (WMSD), few studies focus on supervisors' precise responsibilities in the return-to work (RTW) process and the conditions facilitating or impeding their activity ([Kristman et al. 2017](#), [Durand et al. 2014](#), [Shaw et al. 2014](#)).

## Context

This study was a part of a larger project. The goal of the project was to elaborate guidelines for supervisors, and verify their feasibility and applicability in different workplaces from many sectors of activities in Québec.

## Objectives

- Provide and describe supervisors' responsibilities in the RTW process.
- Describe the conditions facilitating or impeding supervisors' activity in the RTW process.

## Method

A systematic search of three scientific data bases from 1995 to 2017 was performed. The databases the inclusion and exclusion criteria are presented in the flow chart below ([Figure 1](#)). Descriptive and thematic analyses were performed ([Gibbs 2002](#), [Landry 1997](#)) in order to:

- Describe data and methods used in each article;
- Identify the essential activities, and describe actions/interactions, conditions associated with each activity;
- To identify facilitators and/or obstacles.

## Results

- 19 publications (5 reviews, 2 reports, 1 practical guide, 11 empirical studies)
- **8 essential activities** where the supervisor is involved in the RTW process
  - Contact the absent worker;
  - Assess the worker's situation and the work context;
  - Offer, plan, and implement a useful solution;

- Welcome back the worker, integrate him back into the workplace, and adjust the solution;
- Follow-up on how the RTW unfolds;
- Communicate with the worker after the RTW;
- Collaborate with the team and support the worker during their RTW;
- Coordinate all actions aiming for the worker's sustainable RTW.
- **22 specific actions**, and interactions between the supervisor and the worker, as well as with other associated actors;
- **Conditions**  
To help supervisors properly perform their roles, support workers with MSD and accomplish sustainable RTW, organizations should consider:
  - Recognizing the importance of supervisors' role in the RTW, and explicitly stating supervisors' responsibilities in clear procedures;
  - Offering supervisors adequate support – decisional latitude to implement adjustments and accommodations, appropriate training to develop better attitudes, and guidance to build up experience with the RTW process.

## Conclusion

Two main challenges for organizations:

- Formalize in clear and unambiguous ways each party's roles and responsibilities for sustainable return to work;
- Gather knowledge, experience, and know-how regarding sustainable RTW.

## References

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## Acknowledgements

The present literature review, was funded by the Institut de recherche Robert Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail (IRSST), Québec, Canada.

Figure 1

