

Referrals to the Visiting Specialist Clinic

WorkSafeBC's Visiting Specialist Clinic (VSC) in Richmond provides injured workers with access to fellowship-trained specialists within 2 to 3 weeks of an approved referral. This rapid access to care can prevent injured workers from losing their connection to their workplaces and lessen the impact of an injury on their lives. By referring your patient to the clinic you are assured that he or she is being referred to a fellowship-trained specialist with expertise relating to the injury under assessment. The specialists are leaders in their specialties, hold academic positions, and are active in clinical research and teaching. They are nationally and internationally recognized experts who have lectured and presented all over the world.

Referral process

To request a consultation with a VSC specialist, complete a Form 11 (Physician Progress Report) and indicate in the comments section that you are requesting a VSC consultation.

All referrals to the clinic must be approved by the injured worker's WorkSafeBC claim owner, who will review your request with our internal medical advisor and initiate appropriate action. As part of this process the claim owner or medical advisor may contact you to confirm the worker's current symptoms, discuss treatment plans, or both.

The wait for approved clinic referrals depends on referral volume and specialist availability but it can be as short as 2 weeks.

This article is the opinion of WorkSafeBC and has not been peer reviewed by the BCMJ Editorial Board.

Evolution of the VSC

Until the late 1990s all injured workers with approved WorkSafeBC referrals joined long wait lists to access specialists and surgeries. During this time the first private surgical facilities opened in BC. WorkSafeBC entered into agreements with these private health care facilities and, in 1997, took part in the newly initiated concept of expedited services.

The clinic's key role is to provide injured worker-patients access to expedited subspecialist assessments, expedited surgery if warranted, other expedited services, and expert opinions.

WorkSafeBC created the Visiting Specialist Clinic to ensure specialists could assess injured workers in a timely fashion. Once assessed, these patients could be booked for expedited surgery at one of the private surgical facilities in BC.

Today the clinic's key role is to provide injured worker-patients access to expedited subspecialist assessments, expedited surgery if warranted, other expedited services, and expert opinions. The VSC offers a complement of nonsurgical specialists, such as neurologists and physiatrists, who can provide assessments and treatment recommendations for nonsurgical conditions. In 2014 the VSC's 41 specialists provided more than 8000 consultations.

Patient satisfaction

The clinic is a centre of excellence, and its specialists take the time to lis-

ten, understand, and educate patients. On worker satisfaction surveys clinic specialists received results showing close to 90% of patients, on average, were satisfied or very satisfied with the specialist's bedside manner. Recent testimonials from workers include comments such as "made me feel like I counted" and "has taken the time to listen fully and to explain everything to me using my MRI results and other explanations. He inspires confidence in his diagnosis."

Referrals to community specialists

Patients with accepted WorkSafeBC claims can also be referred without authorization to specialists within the community for expedited consultations. The referral must correspond to the area of injury for which the claim has been accepted and the specialist must use the fee code for expedited consultations. See Schedule B of the Physicians Services Agreement between Doctors of BC and WorkSafeBC. Go to www.worksafebc.com/health_care_providers/Assets/PDF/bcma_worksafebc_agreement.pdf to read the document online.

Further details regarding such referrals can also be found in the WorkSafeBC article published in the January/February 2013 issue of the *BCMJ* (2013:55;17), available online at www.bcmj.org/worksafebc/how-gain-speedier-access-specialist.

For information or assistance in referring a patient to WorkSafeBC's Visiting Specialist Clinic, feel free to contact a medical advisor in your nearest WorkSafeBC office.

—Clayton Chmelik
WorkSafeBC Operations Manager,
Provider Referrals and Visiting
Specialist Clinic