

Examining the Issues: Identifying Limitations Due to the Allowed Conditions

By now, most of you are familiar with the third question in our referral letters for PTD examinations. You know- it's the one that asks you to fill in a form indicating what type of work activities you believe the injured worker might be capable of performing.

The most challenging part of this question for most examiners is the statement, "In your narrative report, provide a discussion of physical (or mental) limitation due to the allowed conditions." What this means, in other words, is don't just "check a box." Tell us what- in your expert opinion- you would expect the injured worker to be able to do given their work injury or condition.

Here are some tips for effectively addressing this challenge:

1. **Get personal** – Tell the reader exactly how you would expect these specific allowed conditions to affect the injured worker in front of you. You are the expert. You have seen similar conditions in your training and practice. You have taken a history, examined the injured worker, and reviewed the record. Apply what you know to the case at hand.

Examples: *"Because of the allowed condition of L-5 radiculopathy, she has ankle dorsiflexion weakness and is required to wear a brace and would not be able to climb, run, or carry objects over 10 pounds. She is capable of sedentary activities."* *"Due to the extent of his depression, his ability to adapt to a working environment is severely impaired. He is expected to demonstrate impaired ability to engage with others in the workplace. This makes him incapable of work activities."*

2. **Stick to the allowed conditions** – Some injured workers present with conditions which clearly impair their ability to function, but which are also clearly unrelated to the claim. These might include advanced age, obesity, chronic lung disease, cardiac disease, diabetes, anxiety, or unrelated chronic pain disorders. Though it is difficult to ignore these concomitant conditions, for the purpose of the examination you must make sure to base your opinion only on the allowed conditions.

Example: *"Although Mr. Smith's physical activity tolerance is low, this appears more related to conditions not allowed in this claim, including his rheumatoid arthritis, coronary artery disease, obesity, and chronic lung disease. Based only on the allowed conditions of lumbar strain and bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome (for which he has*

had successful surgery) he would not be expected to have any physical limitations." *"Ms. Perez was diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder prior to her work injuries, and this appears to continue to affect her ability to engage in some work activities, as discussed earlier in this report. However, her mental limitations from her allowed condition of depression appear mild at this time, and would not in and of themselves be expected to preclude work activities at this time."*

3. **Stay on your own turf** – Avoid opining on conditions outside of your specialty. This usually happens inadvertently, but statements like these will doom your report:

Examples: *"I would not expect Ms. Garcia's shoulder and back injuries to limit her physically, but her major problem appears to be some real serious psychological issues."* *"Mr. Green's psychological condition does not in and of itself preclude work activities, but he does continue to suffer pain due to his physical conditions, which might present a barrier to success return to work."* *"The injured worker's low back injury and shoulder dislocation would limit her to sedentary work, but even a casual observer can see that her head injury has caused her significant disability."*

4. **Fill out the form – then fill in the blanks.** Yes, you do have to fill out the form. It's part of the paperwork. Depending on your specialty, it might be a Physical Strength Rating, Occupational Activity Assessment, or Residual Function Assessment. However, realize that these forms – which are meant to be "catch alls" – do not always adequately explain the limitations due to the allowed conditions you were asked to evaluate. Please take the time to think through the actual limitations due to the allowed conditions and then expand on them in your narrative, if the form doesn't do them justice.

Examples: *"Ms. Brown's claim is allowed for traumatic brain injury, and also multiple fractures. Her fractures have healed and do not present any physical limitations. However, she does have significant residual limitations from her head injury including moderate memory loss, difficulty with relationships, poor insight, poor safety awareness, and limited social judgment. These limitations would not allow her to function in most work environments, except those involving simple tasks with continuous one on one shadowing."*

Continuing Education review questions MediScene- April 2011

1. Which one of these forms is not required for an Industrial Commission (IC) PTD IME?
 - A. Physical Strength Rating
 - B. Occupational Activity Assessment
 - C. Residual Function Assessment
 - D. Form 1040 EZ
2. What all should be considered when assessing limitations for an IC PTD IME?
 - A. Comorbidities
 - B. Allowed conditions
 - C. Age
 - D. Body Mass Index
 - E. All of the above
3. The forms filled out in response to question #3, regarding physical and mental limitations, should be expected to account all limitations due to allowed conditions within your specialty.
 - A. True
 - B. False

(Answers: 1. D.; 2. B.; 3. B.)