

Back to Business

OccuCare simplifies and streamlines return-to-work practices.

BY MICHELLE C. PAULOWSKE, OTR/L, CEAS, CFCE

If you work in physical rehabilitation, you need to be well-versed in answering common patient questions. How am I recovering? When can I return to work? Why do I have to stay on light duty? To avoid a guessing game, accurate responses require objective clinical data.

With 7 years of experience in outpatient orthopedics, I've been trained to return injured workers to their previous occupations. When I started working at Sports Physical Therapy and Rehab Specialists, the most difficult task was quantifying clients' job demands and determining if they had the functional ability to meet them. Although I knew how to explain the clinical reasoning for clients' return-to-work challenges based on their therapeutic performance, I couldn't generalize performance to their return-to-work abilities. As a result, I had to refer clients to their doctors for answers. But I don't have to do this any more.

OccuCare Systems and Solutions' comprehensive industrial rehab training program and Web-based software system has changed the way our facility does business. Now I can answer my clients' return-to-work questions with more confidence and accuracy. The software and training helps me document objective return-to-work information as an added specialty to my clinical expertise. And I think of return-to-work goals and functional tasks the moment a client walks in the door for outpatient therapy.

The 4-day training course focuses on using OccuCare's online assessment application, which taught me how to do a better job treating my workers' compensation clients. I was comfortable using the software after performing only 4 to 5 assessments, and I could complete my post-test documentation in 15 minutes. In fact, our entire staff—physical therapy assistants, physical therapists, occupational therapists—found the software user-friendly. I also feel comfortable sending an e-mail or calling OccuCare with questions about assessments, programming or software, and have even sought recommendations about growing and expanding my program.

Prior to participating in OccuCare's training program, I assumed many of my clients didn't need functional testing. But then I saw the bigger picture of workers' compensation treatment. I began performing higher level functional capacity evaluations (FCEs) and implemented a better work hardening program. I also began performing functional return-to-work assessments during outpatient therapy.

For clients, comparing their ability levels to job demands is a wake-up call. For example, many clients don't realize the heaviness of their equipment at work, the repetitiveness of job duties or how the body changes post-injury.

In my opinion, OccuCare's functional progress notes are its most innovative feature. These injury and job-specific re-assessments are

performed during outpatient therapy and accommodate all workers' compensation clients. I perform a functional progress note before a client follows up with his physician. It provides objective information, which helps the physician determine return-to-work abilities.

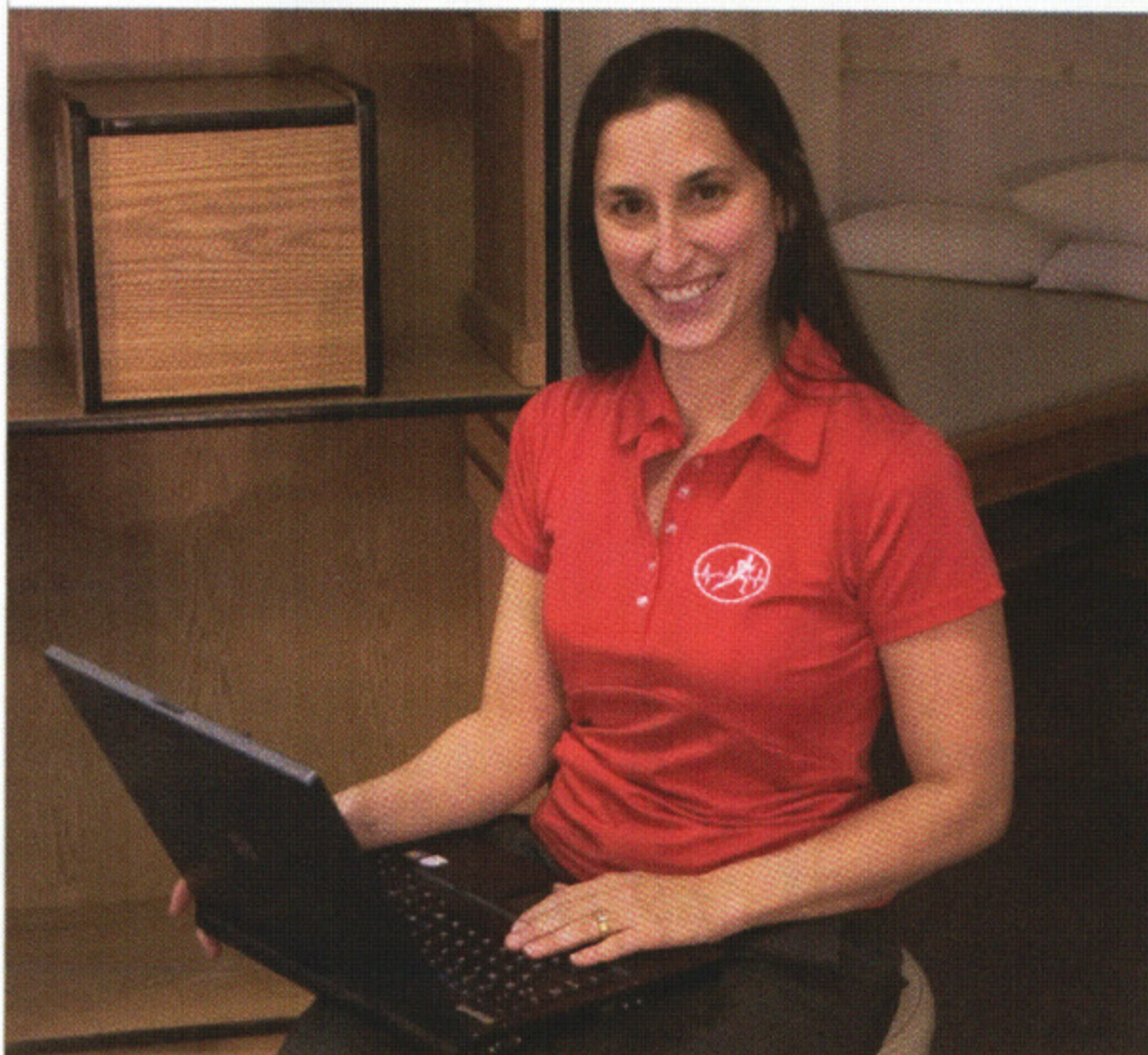
Functional progress notes have enabled me to improve each client's plan of care, and our referral sources and case managers can make more informed return-to-work decisions. Since incorporating these assessments, we've improved and increased our communication with physicians and case managers. And the speed at which I can complete FCEs has improved my productivity and grown my professional practice.

OccuCare's online assessment application has improved the objective quality of my clinical documentation when assessing a client's functional abilities. The quality reports have also increased our workers' compensation referral base. Whether the client is a work hardening patient, an FCE referral or in traditional outpatient therapy, OccuCare assessments validate our plan of care. It's rewarding to see clients progress throughout treatment.

Our goal has always been to specialize in treating the injured worker. OccuCare Systems and Solutions' industrial rehab training and software allows us to consistently accomplish this goal. ■

OccuCare's Web-based software and training allows Michelle Paulowske to treat injured workers with a focus on return-to-work function.

Photo courtesy OccuCare Systems and Solutions



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