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Workers' Compensation Networks Evolve to Meet Changing Needs of Today's Market
High Cost of Injured Workers Prompts Employers to Seek New Options for Controlling Costs

HOUSTON, TX (September 1, 2009) – Injuries that sideline valuable workers in today's economy add additional stress to already overworked employees, and increase burdens and costs for financially strapped employers. The National Safety Council estimates that employers pay almost \$1 billion per WEEK in direct costs and almost four times that amount for indirect costs related to workers' compensation.

The networks of hospitals, physicians, and other providers that employers contract with to care for injured workers can play a key role in controlling workers' compensation costs. To ensure their provider networks are meeting the needs of employees, and returning them to work quickly and safely, employers should examine several factors, including the number, location and type of providers offered by their workers' comp vendors. Rockport Healthcare Group, a national preferred provider organization (PPO) focused exclusively on workers' compensation, has developed the following list of strategies and tips to help employers get the most from their PPO network.

- **Demand flexibility** – Don't let the PPO network dictate the terms, location and number of specialists or providers in your network. Look for a network that will work to meet your needs and that will adjust the roster of physicians and other providers to meet your specific requirements.
- **Ensure accessibility** – Even the best network does little good if it is not convenient for employees. Contracting and credentialing local providers ensures that a PPO network can provide the best physicians and other specialists within convenient locations for the injured workers. In general, primary care physicians, orthopedists and physical therapists should be located within a 15-mile radius of the patient, and specialists within 20 to 30 miles. In rural locations, adjustments will need to be made. However, the emphasis must always be on ensuring that the injured worker can readily get to the provider needed.
- **Promote early intervention** – For years, employers have heard about the importance of early intervention. However, often there is still a delay between the first report of injury, and the integrated responses of the third party administrator and nurse case managers. To ensure prompt intervention, look for programs that bring medical experts into the process immediately.
- **Emphasize diagnostic capabilities** – Recent studies show the overuse of many diagnostic services. For instance, the fastest growing medical expense in workers' compensation is diagnostic radiology. More than \$100 billion is spent on imaging each year, and this expense is growing at a rate of 20% annually. Look for PPOs that offer strong diagnostics when needed, but apply evidence-based medicine to ensure the proper use of such services.
- **Utilize evidence-based medicine** – Evidence-based medicine relies on scientific studies from a number of sources to provide sound clinical guidance on the types of treatments and therapies that provide the best outcomes.
- **Engage your employees** – Employers and supervisors can play an important role in facilitating a safe, prompt return to work for injured employees by keeping them engaged during recovery. Call these employees or send updates routinely; let them know that their contributions are missed.
- **Ensure broad coverage for therapists and counselors** – Stress among workers is at an all-time high due to today's economic environment. This stress leads to increases in workplace injuries, lost productivity and absenteeism – primary factors impacting each employer's bottom line. Workers'

compensation networks should include a breadth and depth of therapists and counselors. In addition, employers should encourage employees to seek help when needed

The last thing employers need in today's economy is to lose a valuable employee to an injury for an excessive length of time," notes Doug Markham, Chief Operating Officer at Rockport. "Employers and employees want to ensure that injuries are treated quickly, appropriately and safely, so that workers can get back to their jobs and the company does not lose any additional money."

About Rockport Healthcare Group:

Rockport Healthcare Group manages a national preferred provider organization network of over 425,000 providers that serves the workers' compensation medical management sector with offices in Texas, Tennessee, Florida and Missouri. The company's single focus of specializing in workers' compensation has resulted in a network of medical providers who understand early intervention, return-to-work guidelines and other industry-specific treatment protocols. For additional information, contact Doug Markham at 800-734-4460 or visit www.rockporthealthcare.com.

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