



The Transformative Effect of COVID on the Work from Home Paradigm

Chairperson: Michael Ready, Esq.

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10:15-11:25am



The process of treatment & recovery of Long Covid when remote work is a viable option

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Issues: The New Workplace and Long Covid

- The new workplace incorporating remote work
- Definition of Long Covid
- Societal impact and impact on workplaces
- The potential role of remote work

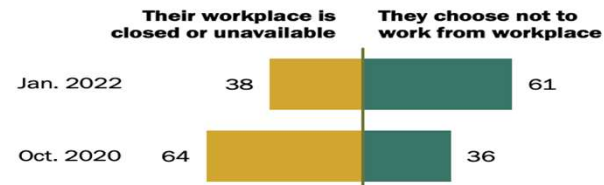
New Workplace: Increase in remote work

Majority of workers with jobs that can be done from home are teleworking, even as more workplaces have become available

Among employed adults who say, for the most part, the responsibilities of their job can be done from home, % saying they are currently working from home ...



Among employed adults with a workplace outside their home who are working from home all or most of the time, % saying they are doing so because ...



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 24-30, 2022.
"COVID-19 Pandemic Continues To Reshape Work in America"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

What is Long Covid?

- Signs, symptoms, and conditions that continue or develop after an initial Covid-19 infection
- Persistence for 4 weeks or more after initial phase of infection
- May be multisystemic
 - Respiratory, endocrine, cardiac, neurological, psychological
- Long Covid is not one condition, but rather potentially overlapping entities with different causes, risk factors and outcomes
 - No single test for diagnosis
 - No formal diagnostic criteria

Many diverse symptoms

- Fatigue
- Brain fog
- Breathlessness
- Muscle pain
- Affected sleep
- Smell
- Taste
- GI symptoms
- Cough
- Headache
- Nasal symptoms
- Chest pain
- Joint pain

Societal impact?

- Economic impact from reduced earnings and medical spending: \$3.7 trillion (Harvard Kennedy School)
- Workers compensation: 50% risk if ICU hospitalization and 5% of all Covid cases (WCRI)
- Linked with unemployment and inability to work full-time (Perlis, JAMA Netw Open)

Role of Remote Work as a Reasonable Accommodation?

- Lack of empirical studies
- Must be a case-by-case evaluation
 - Symptoms and condition: control of timing and place
 - Other accommodations may be important: type of work, amount of total time
 - Employment constraints
 - Prognosis and length of time for accommodation is difficult to predict

References

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Mental Emotional & Behavioral Aspects of Remote Work

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Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Aspects of Remote Work

Psychological Types: Introverts



Introverts excel working from home. Get their energy from being alone and recharging. Work at times when they have most energy. Pace selves. Are more productive with freedom.

Extroverts



Get their energy from others contributing to two key components: assertiveness and enthusiasm. They are more positive which protects them from burnout. A combination of introversion and extraversion leads to even more success in an organization.

Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Aspects of Remote Work

The Mental Health Benefits of Remote & Flexible Work

Flexible job has a 'huge' 'positive' impact on Quality of Life

Work-life balance increases without commute-related stress

More job opportunities in Economically Disadvantaged Areas

Flexible work support the Health and Wellness of Workers

And flexibility enhances the organization's Culture and Productivity

Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Aspects of Remote Work

Major Long-Term Psychological Effects of Remote Work

- LONELINESS** For some, Social Isolation is a real problem
- ANXIETY** Changes of any sort results in Uncertainty that triggers Anxiety
- STRESS** There's a significant divide in people's ability to switch to remote work
- DEPRESSION** when remote work creates ambiguity about job roles, reduced feedback, and decreased social support, this can lead to exhaustion and burnout
- FACE-TO-FACE** If Zoom has helped us recreate a certain degree of face-to-face experience, it's as much thanks to technology as the power of human imagination.

Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Aspects of Remote Work

Behavioral Medicine Treatment for Injured Workers

Telemedicine is obviously not optimal for treatment modalities requiring physical examinations, imaging or bloodwork. But it has revolutionized treatment for the field of Mental Health.

Huge benefit for workers who suffer PTSD and PAIN who can remain in the safety and comfort of their own home, avoid painful travel back and forth from treatment, ease of rescheduling for providers, and greater efficiency.

Mental Health access and treatment quality benefits from remote care. And telemedicine has improved greatly since the beginning of the pandemic. Return to work rates have gone up if anything due to the immediacy of access to interventions supporting patient outcomes.



Ergo Consult for Working at Home

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What To Expect

Virtual Consultation

- Request Process
 - Supervisor approval
 - Self-assessment and request form
 - Photos
 - Side
 - Above
- Virtual Evaluation
 - ZOOM, Microsoft Teams, Webex, SLACK Huddle
- Recommendations



Ensuring a Positive Experience

Employer Considerations

- Organizational Policy
- Clearly Outlined Referral Process
- Equipment Management
 - Approved vendors
 - Delivery
 - Employee termination or resignation
- Manager/Supervisor Education
 - Empathy-based management
 - Flexibility/Non-linear schedule
- Online Resources
 - Training
 - Guidelines/tips



Additional Considerations

- Remote Office Safety Audit
- States Approved for Remote Work
- Accommodation and Specialized Needs
- Common Findings and Recommendations
- **Hybrid Work**

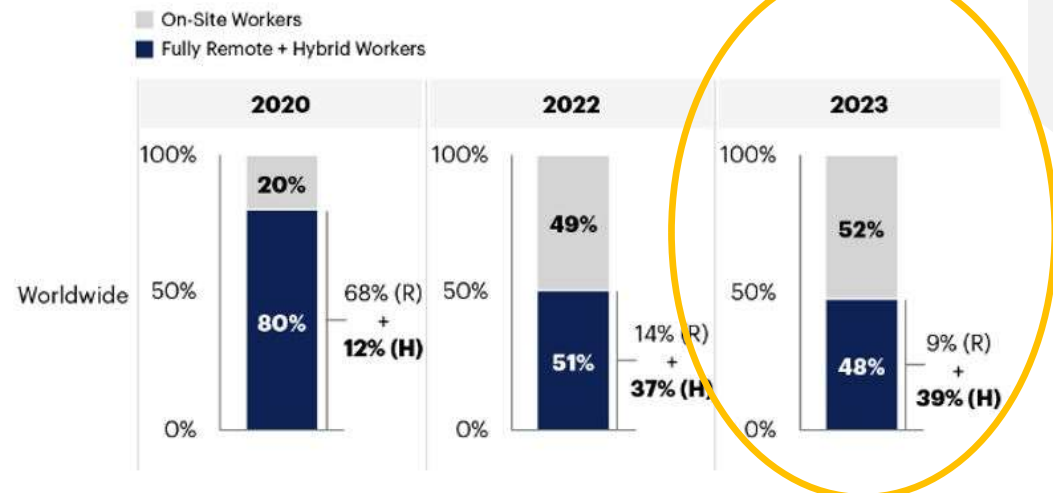


Figure 1: Knowledge Workers' Share for Fully Remote and Hybrid, Worldwide, 2020, 2022 and 2023

- Source: Gartner (March 2023)

Publications of Interest

- ANSI/HFES 100-2007: Human Factors Engineering of Computer Workstations
 - https://webstore.ansi.org/preview-pages/HFES/preview_ANSI+HFES+100-2007.pdf
- Working from Home Checklist (Safety Culture, 2023 – accessed 3.1.2023)
 - <https://safetyculture.com/checklists/working-from-home/>
- The Future of Hybrid Work (Gartner, 2023 – accessed 3.1.2023)
 - <https://youtu.be/U5qfgarKjaQ>
- Future of Work Reinvented (Gartner, 2023 – accessed 3.1.2023)
 - <https://www.gartner.com/en/insights/future-of-work>



Adapting the Work Environment to Remote Work as a Return-to-Work Strategy

**Gail A Carchietta RN,MSE,
COHN-S,FAAOHN**

What we will cover

- 10 elements to consider to prepare for Remote Work
- Sample Accommodations for specific Symptoms
- Resources

Proactive Planning – Recipe for Success

1. Educate Leadership – Long COVID symptoms & potential accommodations
 - a. Nature of symptoms
 - b. Some symptoms reoccur when thought to be resolved
 - c. Potential Accommodations by symptom
2. Review Benefits and Leave Policies
 - a. Many plans have expanded to include services for long covid symptoms that could help workers - understand them so you can support workers
3. Accommodations Request Process should be in place
 - a. Is process documented so worker knows how to request the accommodation
 - b. OHN can be a great support guiding worker through process
 - c. Ensure a clear understanding of what the needs are for accommodations

Proactive Planning – Recipe for Success

3. Ensure there is a space for open communication between OH, HR, Mgr and Worker
 - a. OHN provides support and helps worker understand symptoms and needs
 - b. Manager and HR's understanding of illness critical to open communication
 - c. Ideally, OH is involved during the illness as well as RTW
4. Consider opportunities for job flexibility with HR
 - a. Flexible hours that include breaks for rest
 - b. Task work versus meetings
 - c. See resources for specific examples
5. Have a Remote Work Ergo Plan
 - a. Ensure equipment for remote work is identified and available to order
 - b. Home office Setup instructions and best practices

Proactive Planning – Recipe for Success

6. Most jobs ARE adaptable to remote work with a few exceptions
 - a. Line workers, Lab workers may not be able to be remote
 - b. Is it possible for hybrid work
7. Opportunities for retraining – out of the box thinking
 - a. Are there transferrable skills to other jobs
 - b. Are job share situations possible – on site work and remote work
 - c. Retraining to other position as part of career growth
8. Review job description for each employee request
 - a. Understand the job descriptions and tasks for each request
 - b. Review with worker – what do they think will work/not-work – keep them part of the discussion
 - c. Discuss possibilities with HR/Manager possibilities

Proactive Planning – Recipe for Success

10. Engage EAP as a resource emotional aspects of a long-term illness & remote work
 - a. How does the worker feel about being remote
 - b. How are they managing with their health status and potential setbacks
 - c. Adjusting back to a full work schedule – is there a need for an ease in period
 - d. If there are a number of people in this situation, EAP may be able to coordinate a peer group for those interested as an extra level of support
 - e. Do they have support at home

Symptoms and Accommodations OH can review with worker and lead with HR/Manager

Symptom	Possible Accommodation	Possible Accommodation	Possible Accommodation	Possible Accommodation
Fatigue/Insomnia	Flexible Schedule with scheduled breaks	Anit-Fatigue Floor Mats	Ergo work Chair	Keep work area on the cool side
Brain Fog	Electronic Calendars with reminders	Mobile Apps that help w concentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Separation: • More difficult work at best time of day • Task Flow Charts & written instructions for complex work • Can marginal functions be eliminated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise Blocking strategies to prevent distraction • Train not to respond to emails/teams msgs while working on task
Anxiety	Modified Break Schedules	Mobile Apps for managing anxiety	Home set up that works- eg no noise or soft music etc	
Shortness of Breath/Palpatations	Rest Breaks	Identify Triggers with worker and reduce if possible	Plan of Action if a sudden exacerbation	Cool Temperature

Resources

- MIT Sloan Management Review- How Managers can Support Employees with Long COVID Fiona Lowenstein March 14, 2022.
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN): <https://askjan.org>
- Mayo Clinic: COVID-19 Long-term Effects



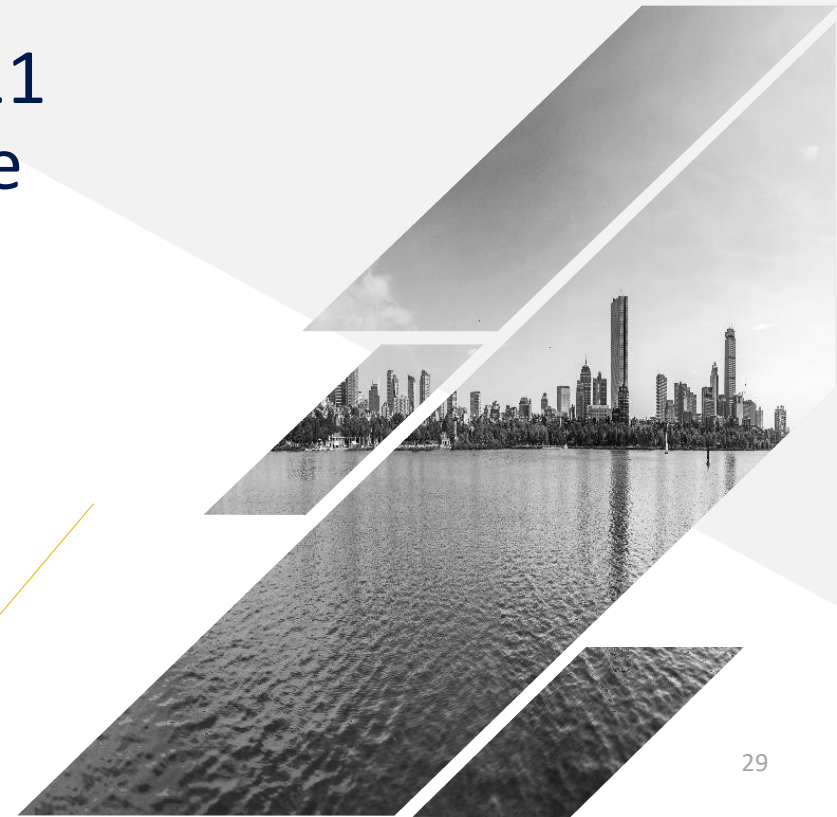
Legal and Claims Issues in Remote Work

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Kiernan & McNally, LLP

Kathy Doyle, Vice President, U.S.
Claims-Gallagher Bassett

The number of people working from home tripled between 2019 and 2021 from 5.7% to 17.9% (9 million people to 27.6 million people). In Massachusetts, 23.7% of employees were home-based.

U.S. Census Bureau-American Community Survey (ACS)



2023

**Work Related Injuries
Workshop**

Remote Employees Injured While Working are Eligible for Workers' Compensation Benefits



Issues to Consider

Was the injury arising out of and in the course and scope of employment?

- How did it happen
- Where did it happen
 - Home office
 - Inside the home
 - On the premises
- When did it happen
 - During work hours
 - On a break
 - After work hours



Risk Management and Claims Challenges

Lack of control over the work premises

Most remote work injuries are
unwitnessed



Recent COVID-19 Decision

Jill O'Meara v. Boston Medical Center Mass.Rev.
Brd. Dec. 020326-20 (Jan. 20, 2023)

Is medical evidence required to establish
causal relationship between work-place
exposure and COVID-19?



Recent COVID-19 Decision

Jill O'Meara v. Boston Medical Center Mass.Rev.
Brd. Dec. 020326-20 (Jan. 20, 2023)

Facts

- RN at BMC
- Allegedly contracted COVID-19 caring for patients on a COVID floor
- Worked 12 hour shifts on May 17, 18, 19, 2020
- Wore PPE (gown, N95 mask, surgical mask, face shield, 2 pair of gloves)
- Developed flu like symptoms
- Tested positive for COVID on May 26



Recent COVID-19 Decision

Jill O'Meara v. Boston Medical Center Mass.Rev.
Brd. Dec. 020326-20 (Jan. 20, 2023)

The employee relied upon her PCP's note:

(The employee) is a patient under my care who was diagnosed with Covid-19 on May 26, 2020. She became symptomatic on May 24, 2020, which timing definitely coincides with work exposure as she worked on May 17th, 18th and 19th on a dedicated Covid-19 floor. Please contact my office with any questions.

The self-insurer's expert opined that the employee likely contracted COVID-19 in the community rather than at work.



Recent COVID-19 Decision

Jill O'Meara v. Boston Medical Center Mass.Rev.
Brd. Dec. 020326-20 (Jan. 20, 2023)

Ruling

After a Hearing, the Administrative Judge denied and dismissed the claim. He held that the PCP's note established a temporal relationship but was insufficient for medical causation. The Decision was appealed.

The Reviewing Board affirmed the Decision and held that expert medical evidence is needed to determine that she contracted COVID-19 at work.

