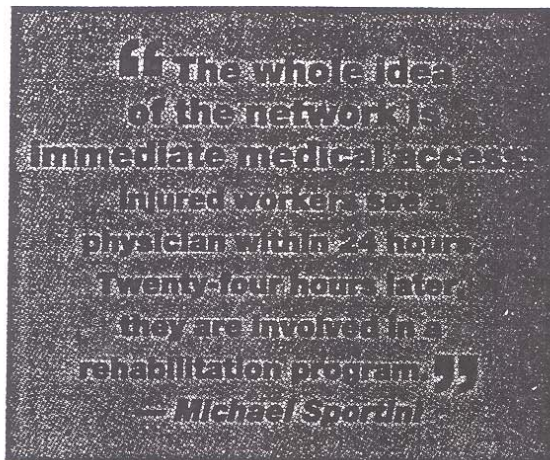


Local Network Delivers on Rehab

When a worker is injured in Plattsburg, N.Y., it is unlikely that he or she will lose even one day of work.

The North Country **On-the-Job Network** will see to that. The Network was developed a few years ago by a group of local manufacturing and service companies, the local hospital and the Plattsburg Chamber of Commerce in an attempt to control the high costs of lost workdays and workers' compensation. Several Plattsburg facilities were last in their corporate structure in terms of work-related injuries and workers' compensation costs, reports Michael Sportini, director of rehabilitation medicine, CVPH Medical Center in Plattsburg.

"One company got an ultimatum to do something or the plant would be closed and relocated. That company had 400 jobs which this area cannot afford to lose," he explains. "So we developed this program."



The group took as its model the sports medicine theory: treat the athlete as soon as possible after he is injured and get him back on the field. Similarly, this program was designed to deliver medical care and rehabilitation to injured industrial athletes to get them back on the job as soon as possible.

When an employee is injured, he or she contacts the case coordinator, a registered nurse. The case coordinator does phone triage to determine if emergency care is needed or if the employee can go to one of 15 volunteer physicians. These doctors must meet criteria that the network estab-

lishes, and they must abide by medical guidelines such as those set forth in the *Medical Disability Advisor*, published by Reed Publications Ltd. of Denver. Each doctor must set aside a few appointments each day for use by injured employees from network member companies.

As part of its mission, the North Country On-The-Job Network has persuaded member employers to commit to transitional-duty programs. If an employee can go back to work, but not to the kind of job he or she was doing before the injury, a less strenuous job with duties that will not aggravate the injury is provided.

Sportini reports lost days from work are minimal, and that employers and employees are happy with the program. In 18 months, it has grown from five member companies to 37, and neighboring communities have expressed interest in participating.

Sportini explains why: "The whole idea of the network is immediate medical access: injured workers see a physician within 24 hours. Twenty-four hours later, they are involved in a rehabilitation program."

For details on the program, call Sportini at (518)562-7599.