Workers' Comp

Functional Capacity Evaluation (FCE) Frequently Asked Questions

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7 MIN READ

What is a Functional Capacity Evaluation (FCE)?

An FCE is a comprehensive assessment used to determine an individual's physical abilities and limitations. This standardized testing process is typically conducted by a trained healthcare professional, such as a physical therapist or occupational therapist. The FCE aims to objectively measure the patient's capacity to perform work-related tasks and activities through a series of tests and observations. The results of an FCE are used to determine the patient's ability to return to work and may offer suggested work modifications or restrictions. They may also assist to guide treatment plans and assess the need for accommodation.

How are FCEs used in workers' compensation?

FCEs play a significant role in workers' compensation cases by providing objective data to assess an individual's ability to return to work after an injury including:

1. **Assessing physical capabilities:** FCEs measure a person's ability to perform work-related tasks, such as lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, standing, walking, and other physical activities. This helps determine if the individual can meet the physical demands of their job.
2. **Comparing abilities to job requirements:** The results of an FCE are compared to the specific physical demands of the person's job or potential alternative jobs. This comparison helps determine if the individual can safely return to their previous position or if job modifications or reassignment are necessary.
3. **Determining work restrictions:** Based on the FCE results, healthcare professionals can recommend specific work restrictions or accommodations to ensure the employee's safe return to work.
4. **Evaluating maximum medical improvement (MMI):** FCEs can help determine if an individual has reached maximum medical improvement, which is the point at which their condition is unlikely to improve further with additional treatment.
5. **Assessing consistency and effort:** FCEs often include measures to evaluate the consistency of an individual's performance and their level of effort during the evaluation. This helps ensure the validity of the results.
6. **Guiding treatment plans:** The results of an FCE can inform healthcare providers about areas where further rehabilitation or treatment may be beneficial.

7. **Supporting legal decisions:** In workers' compensation cases, FCE results can serve as evidence in legal proceedings to support decisions about an individual's ability to work, disability ratings, and compensation.
8. **Facilitating return-to-work programs:** FCEs help in developing appropriate return-to-work plans, including gradual return-to-work schedules or modified duty assignments.
9. **Assessing permanent disability:** In cases where an individual may have a permanent disability, FCEs can help determine the extent of the disability and its impact on their ability to work.
10. **Providing objective documentation:** FCEs offer objective, standardized measurements that can be used by various stakeholders, including employers, insurance companies, and legal professionals, to make informed decisions about an individual's work capacity.

How are FCEs performed?

FCEs are typically performed by trained healthcare professionals, such as occupational therapists, physical therapists, or ergonomists and include:

1. **Interview:** The evaluator gathers information about the individual's medical history, work history, and current functional status.
2. **Physical examination:** This includes assessing range of motion, strength, and flexibility.
3. **Functional testing:** The individual performs various tasks that simulate work-related activities, such as lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, and reaching.
4. **Pain and fatigue assessment:** The evaluator monitors the individual's pain levels and fatigue throughout the evaluation.

When should an FCE be performed?

FCEs should be applied when a comprehensive assessment is needed to determine an individual's ability to perform work-related tasks such as:

1. **After a work-related injury:** To determine if an individual is ready to return to work, and/or to assist in claim settlement and closure.
2. **During rehabilitation:** To track progress and adjust treatment plans.
3. **For disability claims:** To assess the extent of disability and determine appropriate accommodations.

What does an FCE report typically include?

FCE reports are designed to provide a comprehensive and objective assessment of an individual's functional abilities, which can be used by healthcare providers, employers, and insurance companies to make informed decisions about work capacity, disability status, and appropriate accommodations or interventions and typically include:

1. **Demographic information:** Age, gender, occupation, and relevant medical history.
2. **Reason for referral:** Why the FCE was requested and by whom.
3. **Methodology:** Description of the tests and procedures used during the evaluation.
4. **Physical capacity measurements:** Results of strength, endurance, and flexibility tests.

5. **Functional abilities:** Assessment of the individual's capacity to perform specific work-related tasks.
6. **Consistency of effort:** Evaluation of whether the individual demonstrated maximum effort during testing.
7. **Pain behaviors:** Observations of pain-related behaviors and their impact on function.
8. **Comparison to job demands:** Analysis of how the individual's current abilities match their job requirements.
9. **Recommendations:** Suggestions for return-to-work strategies, job modifications, or further treatment.
10. **Prognosis:** Outlook for future improvement or limitations.
11. **Validity statement:** Assurance that the evaluation results are considered valid and reliable.

Will an FCE provide guidance when my injured employee has long term capability impacts?

When requested an Impairment Rating can be completed at the time of the FCE, which provides a standardized measure to assess the degree of permanent impairment an individual has sustained due to a work-related injury. This rating is typically expressed as a percentage and can be used to determine compensation and benefits for the injured employee. Key points of an Impairment Rating include:

1. **Purpose:** To quantify the extent of permanent physical or functional loss resulting from a work-related injury or illness.
2. **Evaluation process:** Conducted by trained medical professionals, often physicians or physical therapists, using established guidelines.
3. **Guidelines:** Most commonly based on the American Medical Association's (AMA) Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment, though some states may use their own specific guidelines.
4. **Factors considered:** May include range of motion, strength, and sensation or be diagnosis based on calculations.
5. **Percentage scale:** Typically ranges from 0% (no impairment) to 100% (complete impairment or loss of function).
6. **Impact on compensation:** The impairment rating often influences the amount and duration of workers' compensation benefits.
7. **Objectivity:** Aims to provide an objective measure of impairment, though some subjectivity may still be present in the evaluation process.
8. **Timing:** Usually performed after the injured employee has reached maximum medical improvement (MMI).
9. **Legal implications:** The impairment rating can be used in legal proceedings related to workers' compensation claims.
10. **Variability:** Ratings may vary depending on the evaluator, guidelines used, and specific circumstances of the case.

How should I use the results of an FCE when managing a claim?

FCEs can gather comprehensive, objective information to make more informed decisions throughout the claims process, potentially leading to better outcomes for both the injured employee and the employer including:

1. **Objective assessment:** An FCE provides an objective, standardized evaluation of the patient's physical abilities and limitations, which can be more reliable than subjective reports or observations.
2. **Return-to-work planning:** The results of an FCE can help determine if the injured employee is ready to return to work, and if so, in what capacity. This information is crucial for developing appropriate return-

to-work plans.

3. **Determining work restrictions:** The evaluation can identify specific work restrictions or accommodations needed, helping the adjuster make informed decisions about job modifications or alternative work assignments.
4. **Assessing maximum medical improvement (MMI):** An FCE can help determine if the patient has reached MMI, which is important for claim resolution and potential settlement discussions.
5. **Validating disability claims:** The evaluation can help verify the extent of a patient's disability, ensuring that compensation is appropriate and preventing potential fraud.
6. **Treatment planning:** FCE results can guide further medical treatment or rehabilitation efforts, potentially reducing long-term claim costs.
7. **Legal protection:** In case of disputes or litigation, an FCE provides documented evidence of the patient's functional abilities, which can be valuable in legal proceedings.
8. **Cost control:** By accurately assessing a patient's capabilities, an FCE can help prevent overpayment of benefits and ensure appropriate resource allocation.
9. **Identifying inconsistencies:** The evaluation can reveal any discrepancies between reported symptoms and observed abilities, which may indicate malingering or symptom magnification.
10. **Facilitating communication:** FCE results can improve communication between all parties involved in the claim, including the injured employee, employer, healthcare providers, and the adjuster.

Are there other considerations when utilizing an FCE?

It's important to note that while FCEs are valuable tools in workers' compensation cases, they should be used in conjunction with other medical evidence and professional opinions. The interpretation of FCE results should consider the individual's specific circumstances, job requirements, and overall health status. Additionally, it's crucial that FCEs are conducted by qualified professionals using standardized protocols to ensure the reliability and validity of the results. As part of any claim evaluation, FCEs can provide a valuable component of the considerations used to facilitate fair and appropriate decisions regarding an individual's ability to return to work safely and productively.

How do I secure FCE services for my injured employee?

Apricus offers streamlined workers' compensation specialty services including an extensive physical medicine program providing a national network of quality providers and in-house licensed physical therapists who provide clinical oversight. When you contact us, you'll gain access to a qualified provider network that delivers comprehensive FCE reporting for better decision making. Our full suite of products and services and cost containment programs help reduce expenses while achieving better outcomes for your injured employees.

Whether it's home health, durable medical equipment, diagnostics or another specialty service, Apricus Specialty Solutions offer a one-stop-shop experience to make sure those recovering from an injury get what they need, when they need it.

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