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# COA Report

California Orthopaedic Association

Sept. 11, 2020

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## WORKERS COMPENSATION GUIDANCE

### The Timing of Physical Therapy for Low Back Pain: Does It Matter in Workers' Compensation?

#### Workers Compensation Research Institute

As an increasing number of workers with injuries are receiving physical therapy (PT), this new study examines whether early initiation of PT is associated with lower utilization and costs of medical services and shorter duration of temporary disability (TD) for workers with low back pain (LBP) only injuries.

The study focuses on claims with LBP-only injuries, recognizing that PT is often used as first-line treatment for LBP and other musculoskeletal injuries before considering opioid prescriptions and invasive procedures. Controlling for a rich set of factors that might influence both PT timing and outcomes, the study answers the following questions:

- How often do workers with LBP-only injuries receive early vs. late PT?
- Does early PT help reduce utilization and costs of medical services and shorten TD duration?
- What factors may have considerable influence on PT timing and outcomes?

This study is based on nearly 26,000 LBP-only claims with more than seven days of lost time from 27 states, with injuries from October 1, 2015, through March 31, 2017, and detailed medical transactions up through March 31, 2018. The 27 states are Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

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## COA Report

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