



Tables Turned:

A Work Comp Exec's Takeaways From Living the Injured Worker Experience

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Learning Objectives

- Dissect an actual recovery journey from the inside out.
- Gain an in-depth understanding of barriers to recovery that include less obvious risks.
- Improve proficiency with identifying risks, preventing recovery delays, managing injuries, delivering exceptional care, and collaboration to drive the most successful recovery journey for injured workers.
- “Ask anything” Q & A.



The Injury







Day 1: Emergent Care



- Ambulance to local hospital
- X-rays and CT scan
- Day 1: fracture reduced
 - Propofol
 - Ketamine
- Phone battery drained, no charger
 - Connection to family, friends jeopardized
 - Marriott staff delivered charger from hotel room

Day 2: Surgical Consult, 1st Surgery

Option 1: full repair, stay in San Antonio 2 to 12 weeks

Option 2: external fixation, print records, travel to Jacksonville and find a surgeon to perform the full repair needed – open reduction internal fixation

Challenges

- No succession planning
- Alone, isolated, on opioids, no advocacy
 - Weather impacted travel, no family support
- 25 minutes to decide
- Surgeon Googled orthopedic surgeons in Jacksonville
- Large practice in Jacksonville, WC coordinator misquoted FL law and stated doctor only treated traumas that occurred in Jacksonville



External Fixation: Maintain Bone Length



Considerations & Challenges






Surgery #1

- External fixation
- Husband arrived evening after
 - Needed pants or shorts
- Pain control
- Edema control
- Transfers
 - In/out bed
 - Bathroom
 - AD: Walker, NWB



1st Hospital Stay





Initial DC Plan: Hospital Case Manager

Discharge plan:

- Nursing home
- Outpatient MD several days later

Questioned this plan:

- 1st visit would be ~ 2 weeks post injury
- External fixator: maintain bone length, not correct internal deformity
- MD visit likely = new diagnostic testing = more follow up = possibly 4 weeks from DOI to get on surgical schedule
 - If bone healing started in misaligned position could be more trauma to correct
 - Healing timeframe could be extended (unnecessarily) by a month or more
- Day 5, DC: hospital CM, “I’ve done all I can.”
 - No further efforts planned
 - Left for the day mid-afternoon
 - On-call through early evening



Subsequent DC Plan: Relief, Reassurance

Reached out to friends in the industry

- A friend, cardiac surgeon in Jacksonville made some calls
- Trauma center in Jacksonville – new DC plan
 - Finalized as hospital DC was in progress
 - Hospital CM called at home to update orders
 - IV forcefully removed by annoyed staff
 - Transport to trauma center – no beds available but would work it out
 - Slept in trauma center hallway overnight
 - Surgery #2 occurred next day (Day 6)



Transportation: San Antonio to Jacksonville Air Ambulance

Commercial flight

- Required to keep lower leg elevated
- 2 airport journey to get to Jacksonville
- Blood clot risks

Rent RV and drive

- ~15 hours, 1060 miles
- Blood clot risks

Air Ambulance (best option)

- ~2 hour direct flight
- Ambulance transport
- Pain control
- Medically supervised



Surgery # 2: ORIF





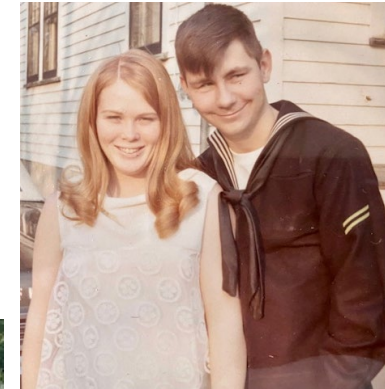
Off Work, But Work to Be Done

- Counterparts and coworkers took on duties
- Phone continued to ring
- Work needed to continue



Psychosocial Factors: Self

- Grief
 - Mom passed away unexpectedly <3 months prior to accident
 - Needed help to deal with loss
- Fear
 - Future function
 - “Lucky still had my leg”
 - Every stage of recovery with new challenges
 - Falling
 - Loved ones falling
 - Being able to perform job duties fully
 - Performing recreational activities: hiking, dance, running



Psychosocial Factors: Family

Husband

- Business owner/self-employed
- Share household tasks
- Home renovation in progress

Father

- Dealing with loss of wife of 54 years
- Embraced taking over my day care

Adult Children

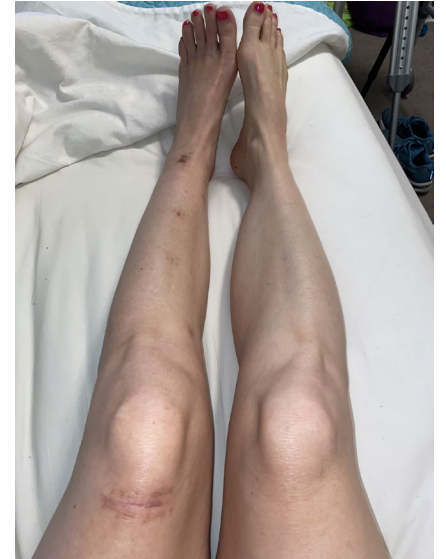
- Son, wife, and their children
- College-age daughter



Prescriptions & Equipment

Prescribed drugs

- Pharmacy toggled back/forth incorrectly between group health and WC carrier in system
- Approvals from CM vs ADJ



Delay's in obtaining prescribed DME

- Bone stimulator RX was DWC 25
- Missing a page of DWC 25, so not an RX
- It took several days to realize missing page

Toilet arms too wide

- New toilet was agreed to arrive same day as DC
- Received call that it would come after DC



Communication Between Stakeholders

- San Antonio surgeon was 1 and done
- Communicating with Jacksonville trauma team
 - Portal
 - Phone
 - Advised to just come in
- Pharmacy to carrier & me
- Orders getting from MD to others
- X-ray order



Community Integration Challenges

- Accessible parking
- Toilets
- Grocery shopping
- Restaurants
 - Wheelchair = good
 - Crutches = difficult



Delayed Union of Bones, Elbow Issues

11 weeks post injury = no healing

18 weeks = tibia started to heal

27 weeks = tibia healing well, fibula at risk for non-union

49 weeks = tibia healing well, fibula healing but misaligned

Elbow with pebble like floaters

- MRI ordered
- Referral to specialist (5 months post)
- “Watch & see”
- Ultimately went to personal MD to treat

2 years, 1 month = fibula still splintered



8/22 (6 months post-injury)

- Tibia healing, fibula lacking
- 3rd surgery 9/6/22: hardware, nerve
- Tymlos daily

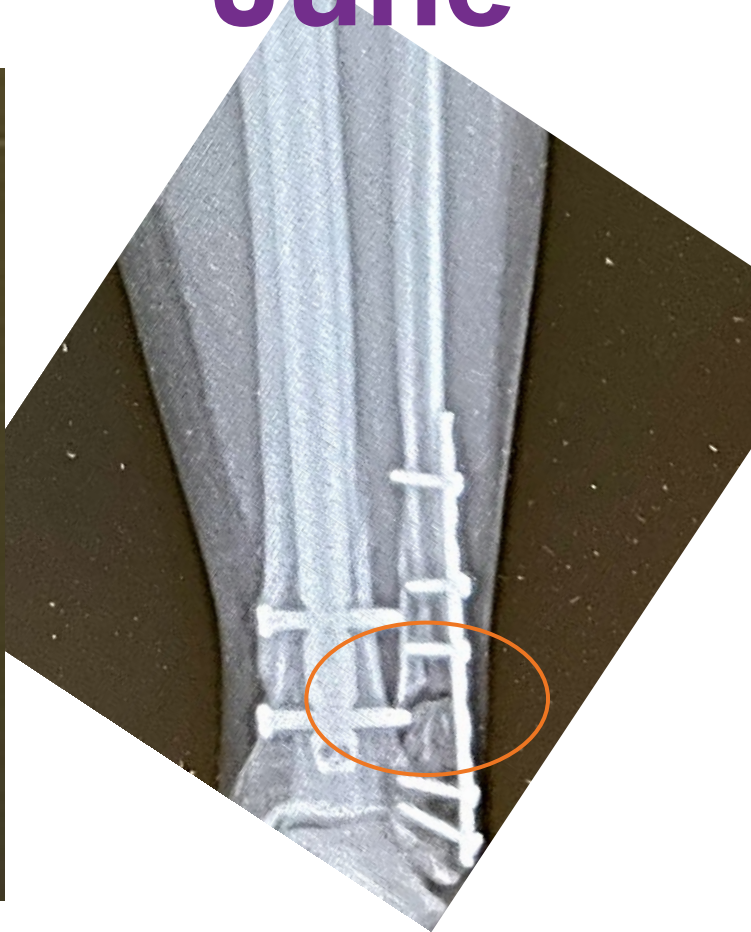
- 5+ months bone stimulation
- 4th surgery 10/13/22
- 5th surgery 10/5/23



April



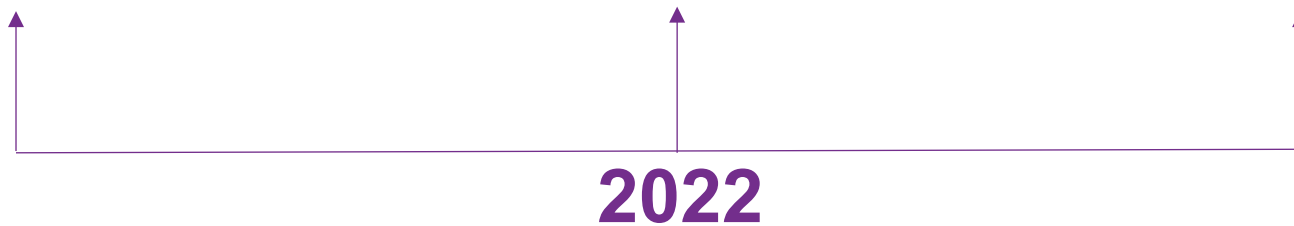
June



August



July '23



October 2023



February 2024





Thousands of runners made their way through the 15K course of the 2022 Gate River Run Saturday in Jacksonville, Florida, on March 5, 2022.

BOB SELF/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION



The Good

3/5/2023



3/2/2024



Employer - Adjuster - Case Managers



Proactive Provision of Equipment

- Wheelchair & cushion
- Walker
- Toilet arms
- Shower chair
- Wheelchair ramp



Support From PT Professionals at Conference

- New friends from OK
 - Carried me into the building
 - Called 911
 - Stayed in touch
- Friends attending conference
 - Stayed in communication
 - Offered to help pack up hotel room
- San Antonio Marriott Riverwalk
 - Delivered phone charger & toothbrush

2022



2023

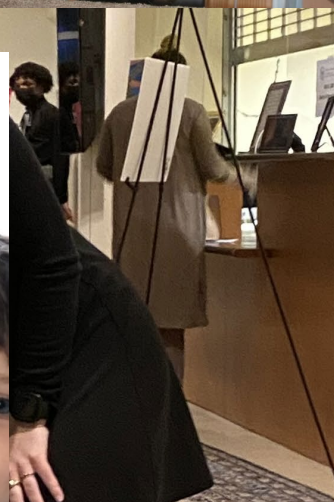


Trauma Team: Jacksonville, FL

- Excellent care provided from trauma ER through hospital DC
 - Overnight in trauma ER
 - Next day surgery
 - Admitted to hospital
 - Discharged evening of 2/11/22



Family/Friends Support





PT (Finally)

January 2023 & HealthJoy 9/2023-6/2024

Ability to Self-Advocate

- Personal knowledge of medical & workers' compensation system
- Incorrect info given from physician group's work comp coordinator in Jacksonville
 - Doctor did not work there
 - Doctor did work there but, "only treated traumas that occurred in Jacksonville"
 - "Under FL law, cannot treat work comp for 90 days."
- Succession plan was originally left to me
 - Records in hand, go find a surgeon
- Hospital CM created a plan that had potential for delayed recovery
 - Possibly up to 4 extra weeks
 - Personal friend came through to help create a new plan
 - We had to insist the hospital DC plan be updated
- Potential delay in toilet chair arrival
- Pressed MD to release to full duty early
 - RTW day 18, ODG best practice = 51, average = 115 days



Improving Our Contributions to the Recovery Journey



Early Engagement: Empathy & Compassion

- Expertise delivered with empathy
- Most important = the injured worker
- Deliver services and products fast
- Strive for normalcy
- Tensions are high (all around)
- Missing what is lost



Stakeholder Collaboration



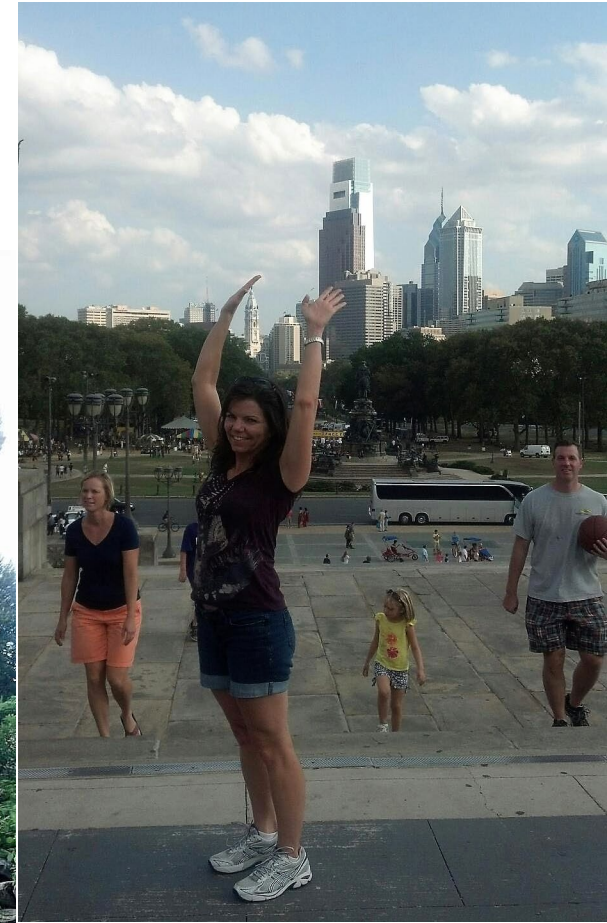
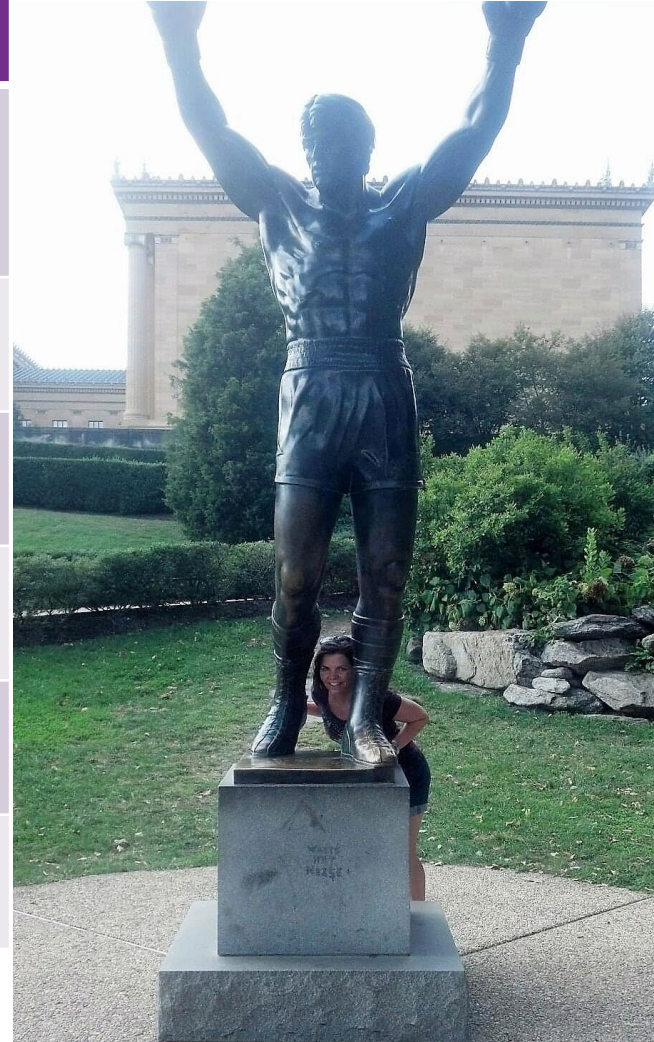
Proactive Management

- Forecast needs and consider action
- Advocate for IW, they are not experts
- My recovery journey could have been prolonged unnecessarily
- Set expectations early
- Prevent psychosocial issues, if possible
- Address psychosocial issues if present



Realistic Expectations

What I Anticipated	What Actually Happened
Set fractures, start healing	5 surgeries, 2 cities, 9 days hospitalized, 22 incisions
Up to 12 weeks of healing then “normal”	Bone healing did not start until ~18 weeks
Mid-May ‘22 going to PA, run up the “Rocky stairs”	Pending
Resume running, cycling, etc. ~3 months	First attempt at running February 2023
Industry professionals are experts	Not all are
The families should just step up to help	It is very difficult for them too



Key Takeaway

Injured workers are not usually work comp experts, be the best at what you do.



Questions & Answers

Thank You!



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Literary Sources

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