

Effective use of job requirements for case management



Why are job descriptions important?

Return-to-work (RTW) programs improve both health and financial outcomes for injured employees.¹ When healthcare systems and employers work together on RTW initiatives, disability durations decrease and outcomes improve.^{2,3} Case managers can help translate clinician restrictions into work accommodations to enable the patient to return to their normal routine and meet Americans with Disability Act requirements.

What information is available?

One of the most utilized tools is the U.S. Department of Labor's **Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)**, however, this dataset has not been updated since 1991. Job class categorizes employees based on physical strength needed at work: Sedentary, Light, Medium, Heavy, and Very Heavy. This information is built into many disability management workflows.

Another data source is the **Occupational Information Network (O*NET)**, which has standardized descriptors of more than 1,100 occupations and is regularly updated. This website is sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Labor and provides an overview of job tasks, knowledge, skills, abilities, work activities, and wages. This information is free and easily searchable. <https://www.onetonline.org/>

Additionally, the **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)** can help case managers ask the right questions and advise ways to adjust daily work activities so the patient can RTW without aggravating their condition. This U.S. Dept. of Labor sponsored website provides detailed scenarios of occupational requirements and accommodations that would allow for removal of work barriers. This information is free and easily searchable. <https://askjan.org/>

Applying a job description to a case

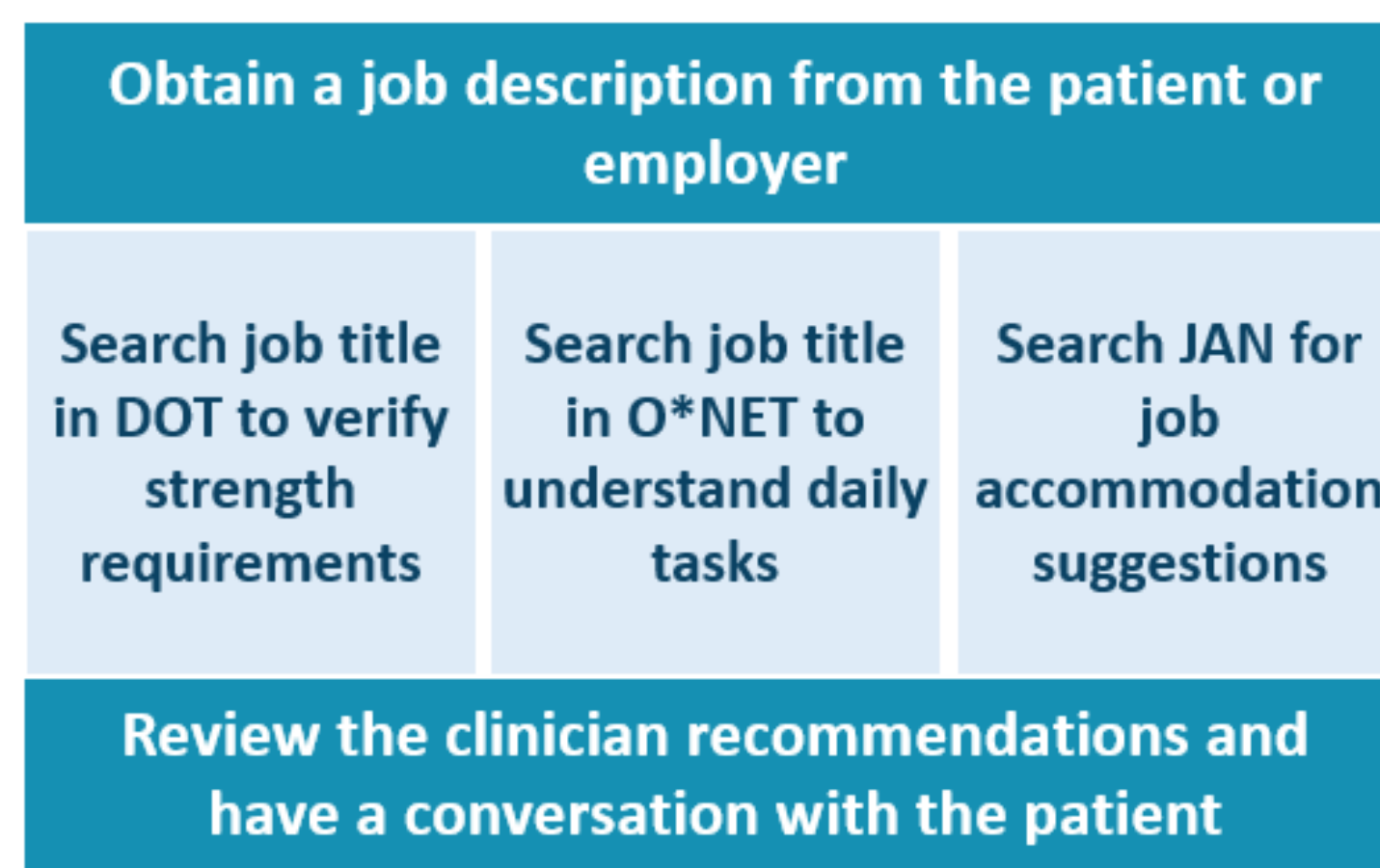


Figure 1. Outlining information gathering prior to speaking with a patient.

First, familiarize yourself with the work tasks the patient probably does at work. Use online tools to:

- Verify strength requirements, such as lifting, pushing, pulling or time spent sitting, walking (DOT)
- Understand daily tasks needed to be successful at the job, such as skills, knowledge, and abilities (O*NET)
- Strategize alternative ways to accomplish daily tasks that don't interfere with clinician determined work restrictions (JAN)

Then discuss this information with the patient so they are prepared for a conversation with their employer.

It is important that clinicians provide detailed work restrictions outlined in clear, objective terms. For example, "no heavy lifting" may be hard for an employer to interpret, but "may lift 10 pounds from the floor to the waist up to 12 times per hour" can be more practically applied.

A case manager can help interpret the medical restrictions into work accommodations that the patient can refer to when discussing RTW with their employer. Freely available, online tools provide case managers with information so they can provide useful suggestions to ensure that the employer-employee conversation is productive.

The goal is to empower the patient to discuss with their employer accomplishable and safe work tasks.

Future developments

The Social Security Administration is currently building a searchable, user-friendly platform combining the DOT, O*NET, and the Bureau of Labor Statistic's Occupational Requirements Survey. This data has information on 90% of workers in the U.S. including education, training, cognitive requirements, physical demands, and environmental conditions.

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