



Physical Ability Testing

Since the inception of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) many companies have struggled to find a way to ensure that potential employees are physically capable of performing a job with minimal risk of injury. A routine pre-employment physical is useful in find a limited range of physical impairments that can potentially disqualify a perspective employee. However, the finding of routine physical are sometimes subjective when determining the potential employees' ability to perform a specific job. With this 'grey area' in the hiring process, many companies have decided they need something more concrete to help determine if the prospective employee can or cannot perform essential tasks.

When making the decision not to hire a person based on an inability to perform the requirements in the job description, companies need to have a standard of measure that is non- discriminatory and precisely proves their case. This standard must show without question that an employee was unable to perform a task or series of tasks that are necessary for the job in question. The standard must also be easily duplicated and used to measure all employees applying for that specific job.

The best way companies have found to provide this measuring tool is the Physical Ability Test. This testing process involves a number of tasks customized to fit a specific job description. These tasks are broken down and duplicated in a clinical setting where a medical professional can review the outcome and make a determination as to the person's ability to perform the job. If a potential employee fails any portion of the Physical Ability Test the employer can legitimately disqualify the applicant.

Physical Ability Testing is not designed to disqualify a large number of applicants. Actually numbers can vary. However a usual number of applicants disqualified by use of a physical ability test will range from 1% to 5%. This number may seem low, especially when cost-factoring the price of the testing. However, if only one in every 100 cases were disqualified, the cost savings could be measured in the thousands of dollars.

In order for the Physical Ability Test to be used as a hiring tool, each part of the test must be a reflection of the specific job task. It is necessary for the company to have management and supervisors review the testing procedures and determine if the test accurately duplicates the job duties. Once this is done, the Physical Ability Test will be one of your strongest tools available in helping to reduce Workers' Compensation costs.

Validation Process for Physical Ability Tests

All Physical Ability Tests (PAT's)) need to follow a validation process to help ensure they hold up in court are accurate representations of the job. The validation process should include the following steps.

1. In order to utilize a post offer/pre-employment Physical Ability Test (PAT) management must provide or establish a job analysis that specifies what tasks must be done and the frequency of these tasks. Proven Occupational Health can provide this service using precision equipment including force gauges, grip strength (pinch) gauges, videotape, a scale and measuring tape. If Proven is to perform a job analysis, upon completion of the analysis, Proven staff will meet with company representatives to review the analysis. Once agreed upon, both parties will sign off on the analysis stating that it is an accurate representation of the job.
2. If a PAT is to be established, then the essential functions of the job will be identified using the comprehensive job analysis. Once the essential functions are determined, A PAT will be designed to test for these essential functions.
3. In Order to further validate the PAT, the company must also provide 3 or more random, anonymous non-management employees to take the PAT and advise if the components of the PAT adequately duplicate job specific requirements. When reporting their findings Proven staff will not indicate which of these test subjects gave which opinion to be sure they remain anonymous.
4. Proven Occupational Health must train each employee who will administer the PAT to be certain that all testing is done with consistency. A record of PAT tests performed including patient name, date of test, person giving the test, and testing outcome will be maintained by Proven for future reference.
5. The PAT will proceed with periodic re-evaluation according to the opinion of the Company. Essential functions and the PAT will be modified and again signed off by the company representatives.
6. PAT testing is to be used only as a pre-employment/post offer evaluation. Return to work testing must be completed as a functional capacity evaluation but may still include the basic form of the PAT test.



PAT EXAMPLE

Patient Name _____ **Date** _____

1. Transfer chute (50 pounds) from 1" walk 30 feet and place on 44" platform, 6 times.

Able _____ Unable _____

2. Carry 47 lbs from 6" height for a distance of 50 feet and place on a 50" platform 4 times.

Able _____ Unable _____

3. Climb up and down 5 rungs on a ladder, 5 times.

Able _____ Unable _____

4. Climb up and down a 25" step, 5 times.

Able _____ Unable _____

5. Push 35 lbs of force upward on a diagonal 2 feet (using Keiser set at 28 lbs, Level 3), 4 times.

Able _____ Unable _____

6. Pull 45 lbs of force downward approx. ½ foot (using Keiser set at 42 lbs, Level 8), 9 times.

Able _____ Unable _____

Comments:

Clinic Representative