



Voice-of-the-Customer Initiative

Vocational Consultant Survey

A summary

Workers' Compensation Division

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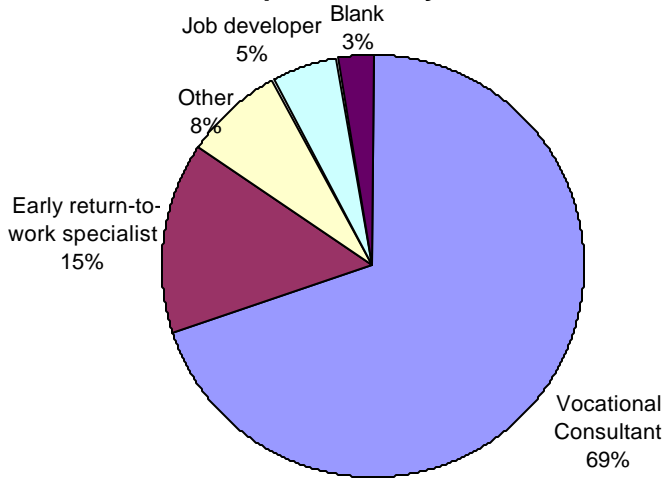
Vocational Consultant Survey

The Oregon Workers' Compensation Division (WCD) began working on an initiative called Voice of the Customer in December of 2001. Its goals were to identify our customers' and stakeholders' priorities as they relate to workers' compensation information and services, to develop a sustainable process to measure the levels of satisfaction with our services, and to develop processes and materials for continuous input. The initiative is expected to be completed, with all processes in place, by Fall 2004.

In the Fall of 2003, WCD conducted a survey of vocational counselors and return-to-work specialists. The survey was designed to find out from these customers their priorities for the types of information and services they need, how they prefer to receive information, what information and services are needed that are not currently provided, and their level of satisfaction with WCD. Since WCD certifies vocational counselors, a list of those currently certified was used as the survey population. WCD also attempted to reach return-to-work specialists of insurance companies. Insurers using the Employer at Injury program more than 100 times since 1997 were contacted to provide names of their employees who specialize in return-to-work. The total number of surveys mailed was 378. One hundred forty surveys were returned (37 percent). Of those who responded, 114 (80 percent) were still involved in the workers' compensation system and completed the survey.

Of the 114 respondents who indicated they are involved in the workers' compensation system, 72 percent were vocational consultants. Another 15 percent were early-return-to-work specialists, five percent were job developers, and vocational consultant interns and nurse case managers each accounted for three percent. Forty-four percent of those completing the survey have been involved in the workers' compensation system for more than twenty years, 23 percent for sixteen to twenty years, and 24 percent for five to fifteen years. Only 9 percent have been involved for less than five years. Vocational consultants appear to be highly educated - 47 percent have a master's degree and 4 percent hold a doctorate. Another 34 percent have a bachelor's degree and two percent have an associate degree. Only 13% had no secondary degree. Consultants were also asked what other certification they have. Of the large variety given, Certified Rehabilitation Counselor and Certified Disability Rehabilitation Specialist were the most prevalent. About forty-one percent of vocational counselors work for private rehabilitation organizations and 27 percent are self-employed. Other employers include government agencies, 16 percent, insurers, 11 percent, and self-insured employers, 4 percent.

Figure 1a: How involved in the workers' compensation system



Note: "Other" includes vocational consultant intern and nurse case manager.
Due to rounding, percents may not be equal to 100.

Figure 1b: For whom do you work?

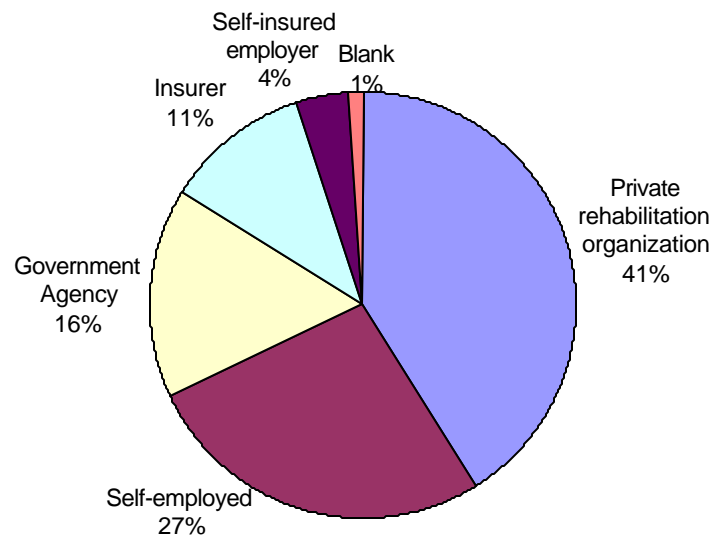


Figure 1c: How long have you been involved in the WC system?

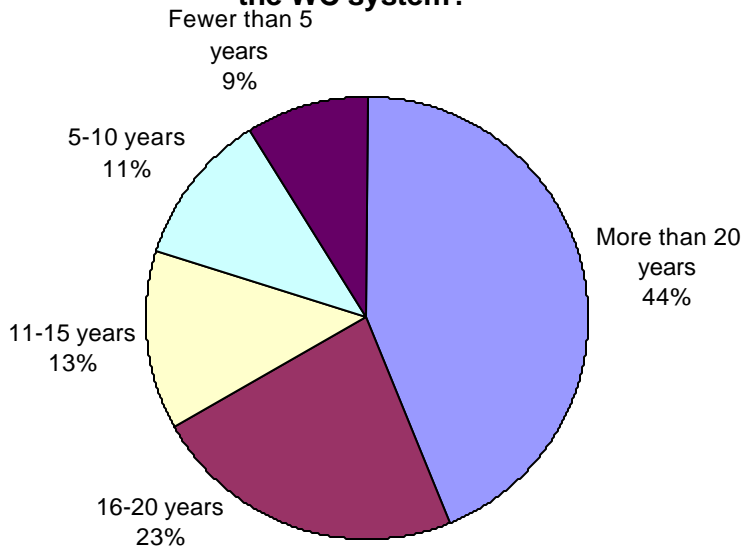
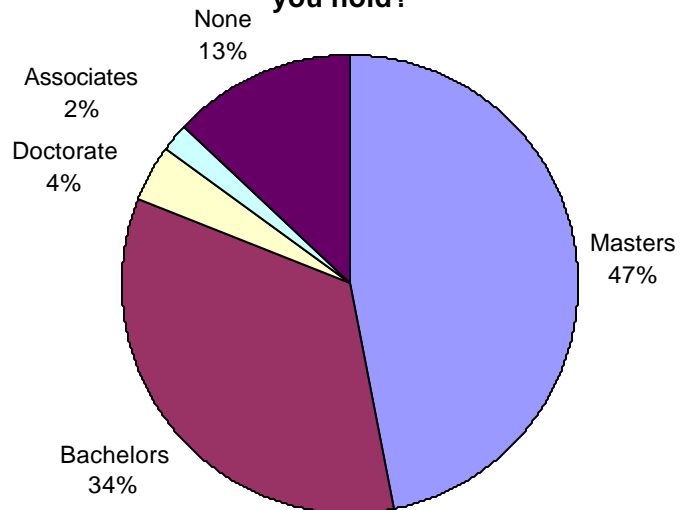


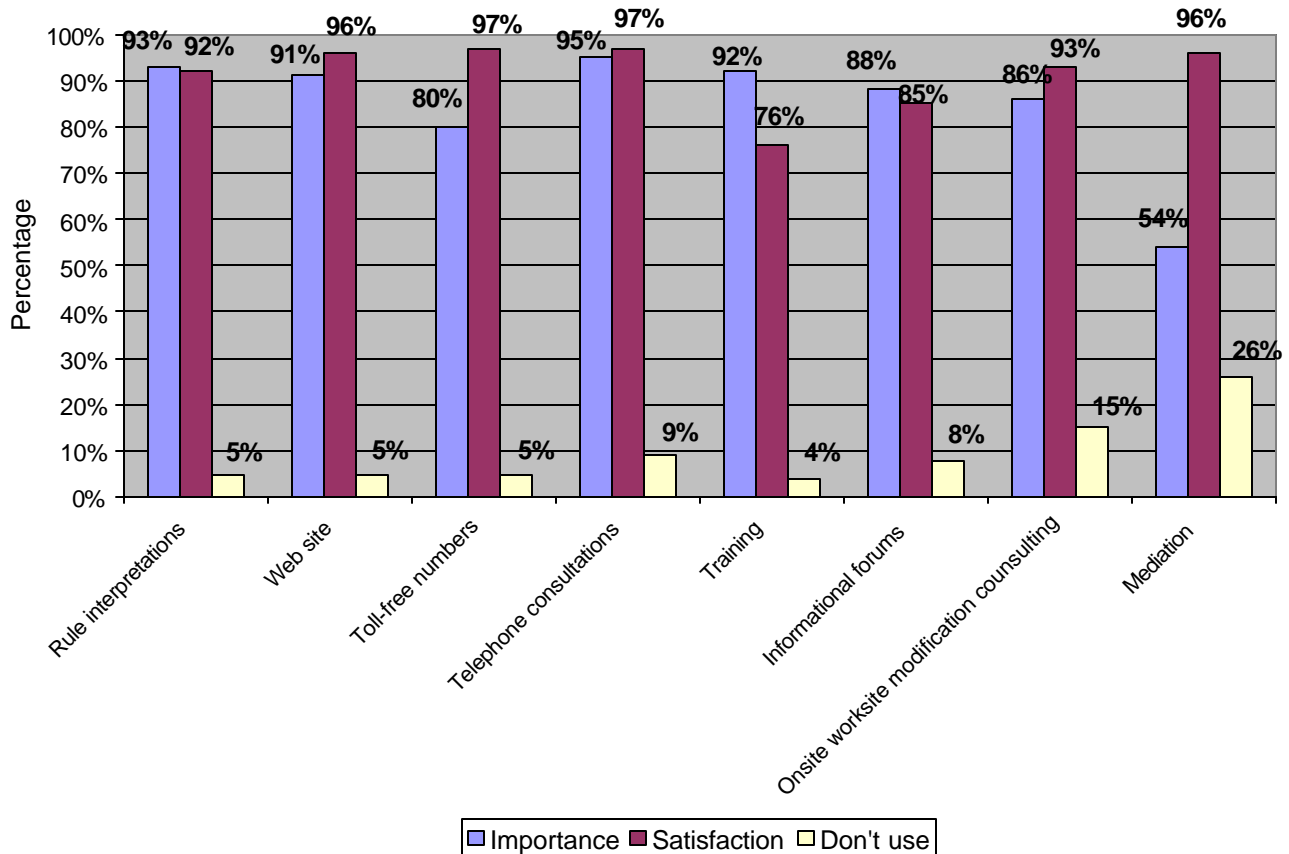
Figure 1d: What post-secondary degree do you hold?



Vocational consultants were asked to rate the importance of, and their satisfaction with, eight services provided by the Workers' Compensation Division. Those who indicated they did not use the service or left the question blank are not included in the satisfaction and importance ratings. Rule interpretations, the web site, telephone consultations, training, informational forums, and onsite worksite modification consulting were all rated high in importance. Only two of the services, toll-free numbers and mediation

were of low importance. Respondents were satisfied with all of the services rated as important, except for training and informational forums.

Figure 2. Importance of and satisfaction with WCD services



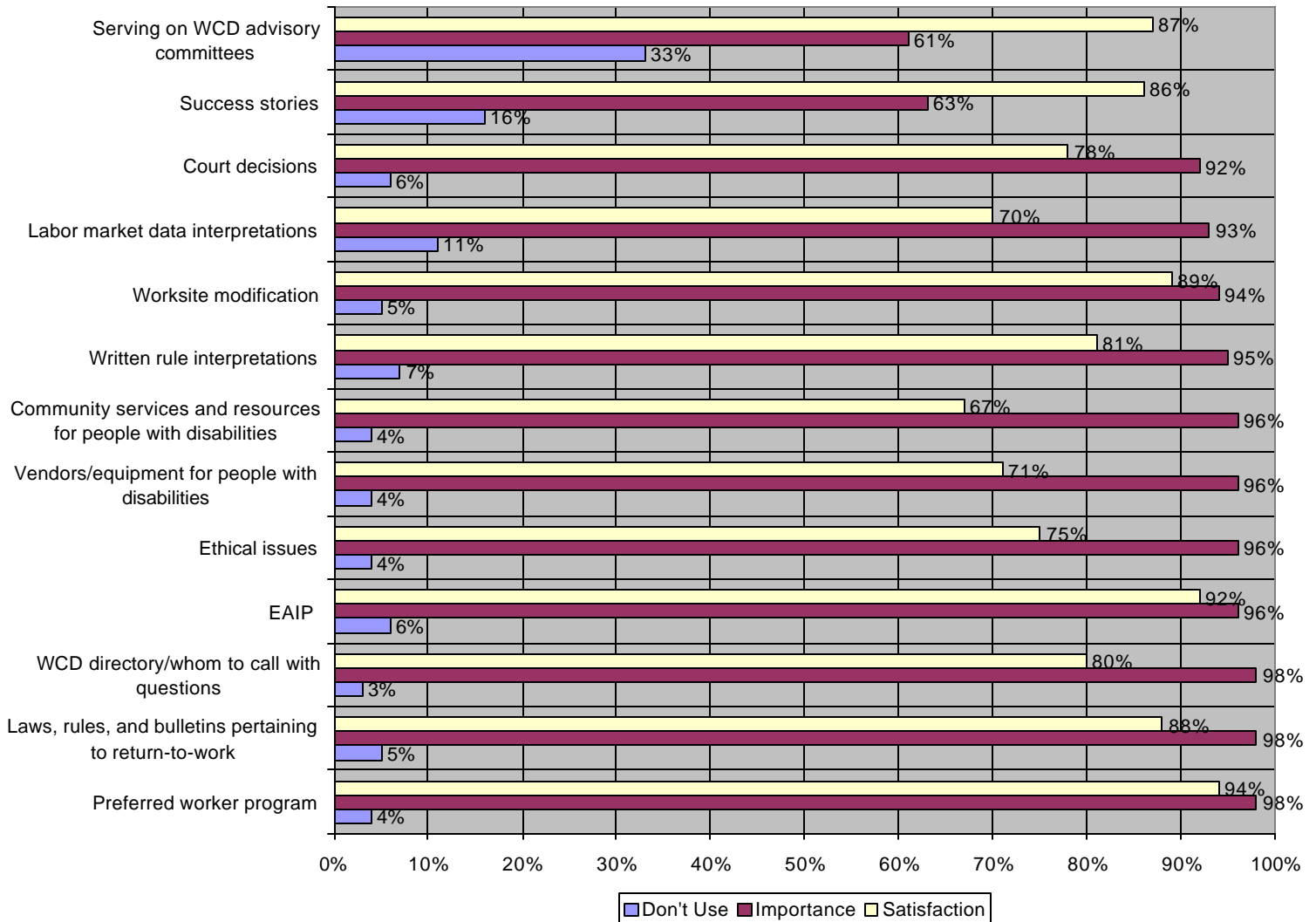
Note: Satisfaction and importance rating exclude those who don't use the service.

Respondents also reported their satisfaction with seven WCD administrative processes. The highest satisfaction scores were with training plan review at 94% and the Preferred Worker program, both the contract approval process at 91 percent and the reimbursement process at 92 percent. The external WCD advisory rulemaking process (88%) and the Employer at injury reimbursement program (85%) followed next. The lowest satisfaction scores were for the appeals process (77%) and the dispute resolution process (70%).

In order to determine the importance and satisfaction consultants place on information received, they were asked to rate thirteen different areas. All but two of the areas were rated as highly important. Success stories and serving on WCD advisory committees rated low in importance. Of those rated high in importance, consultants were the least satisfied with information they receive on community

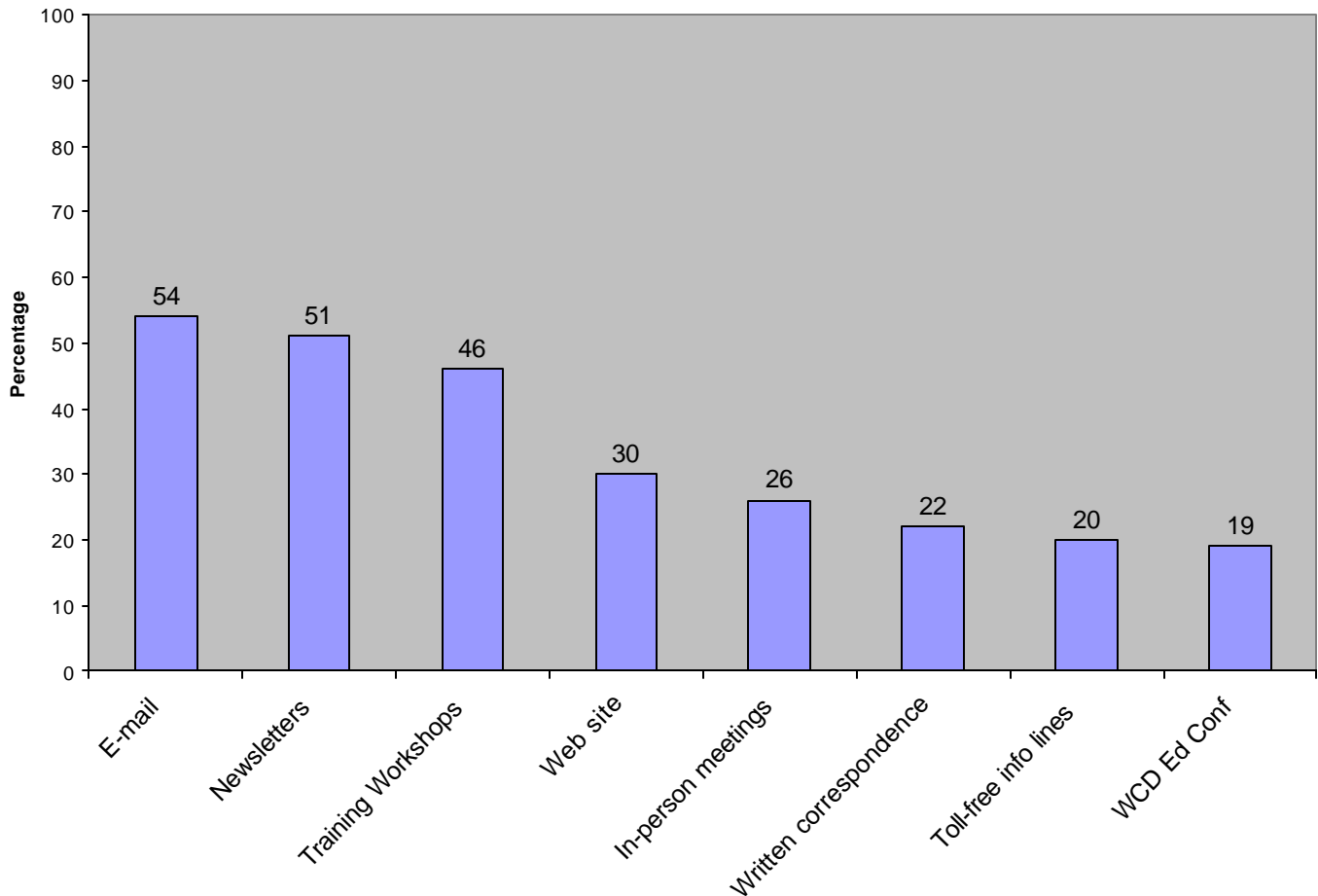
services and resources for people with disabilities (67%), labor market data interpretations (70%), vendors/equipment for people with disabilities (71%), ethical issues (75%), court decisions (78%), and a WCD directory/whom to call with questions (80%).

Figure 3. Importance of and satisfaction with information received



When asked the three ways they most prefer to receive information from WCD, consultants named e-mail, newsletters, and training workshops. The web site, in person meetings in their geographical area, and written correspondence were the next preferred ways of receiving information. The least preferred were video teleconferencing and conference calls. Other ways consultants prefer to receive information included workshops or training locally and the U.S. mail.

Figure 3: Ways vocational consultants prefer to received information

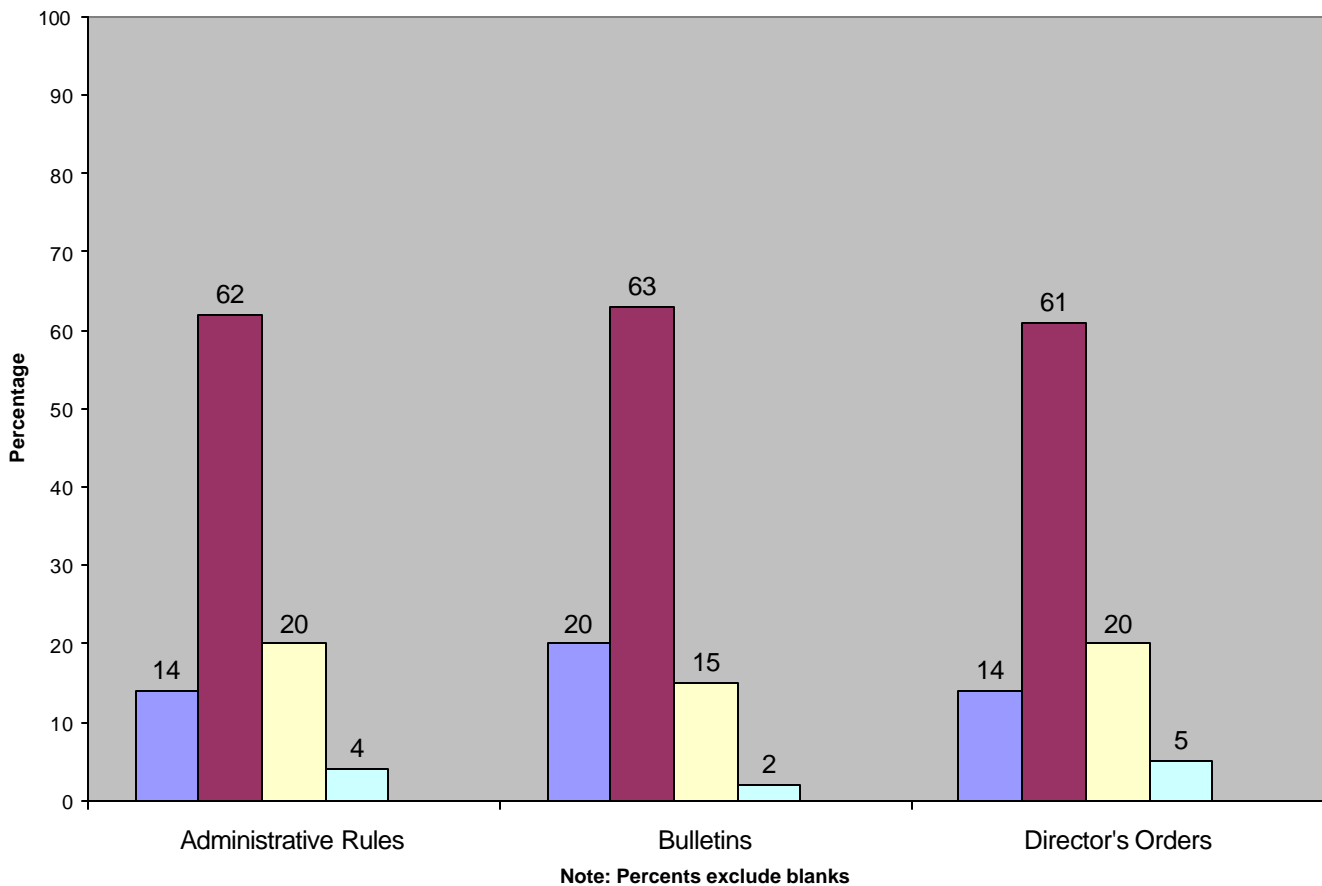


Consultants were asked what services, information, or administrative processes they found dissatisfying. Mentioned most often was the consultant's inability to find appropriate training close to their location that did not require more than a few hours away from work. The dispute resolution process received comments about the length of time to reach a decision and the decisions being biased toward the worker. The worksite modification authorization process was also felt to be too complicated. Consultants were also asked to name services or information they need but do not receive. An updated WCD staff directory and labor market data were named most often. Better case law information was also requested including adding court and board decisions to the WCD Web site. More information about vendors and community resources was also requested as was training on vocational administrative rules. When asked if WCD could assist them with only one thing, what

would they like it to be, vocational counselors most often named assistance with administrative rule interpretation, labor market data, and the approval, coordination, and delivery of the Preferred Worker program.

WCD publishes and distributes information used by vocational counselors in the form of administrative rules, bulletins, and director's orders. These provide guidance in interpreting and complying with the regulations governing the programs they use. Vocational consultants were asked to rate the clarity of administrative rules, bulletins, and director's orders. Administrative rules clarity was rated excellent by 14 percent, good by 62 percent, fair by 20 percent, and poor by 4 percent. Bulletins received a higher clarity rating with 20 percent rating it as excellent. They were rated as good by 63 percent, fair by 15 percent, and poor by only 2 percent. Director's orders were rated excellent by 14 percent, good by 61 percent, fair by 20 percent, and poor by 5 percent.

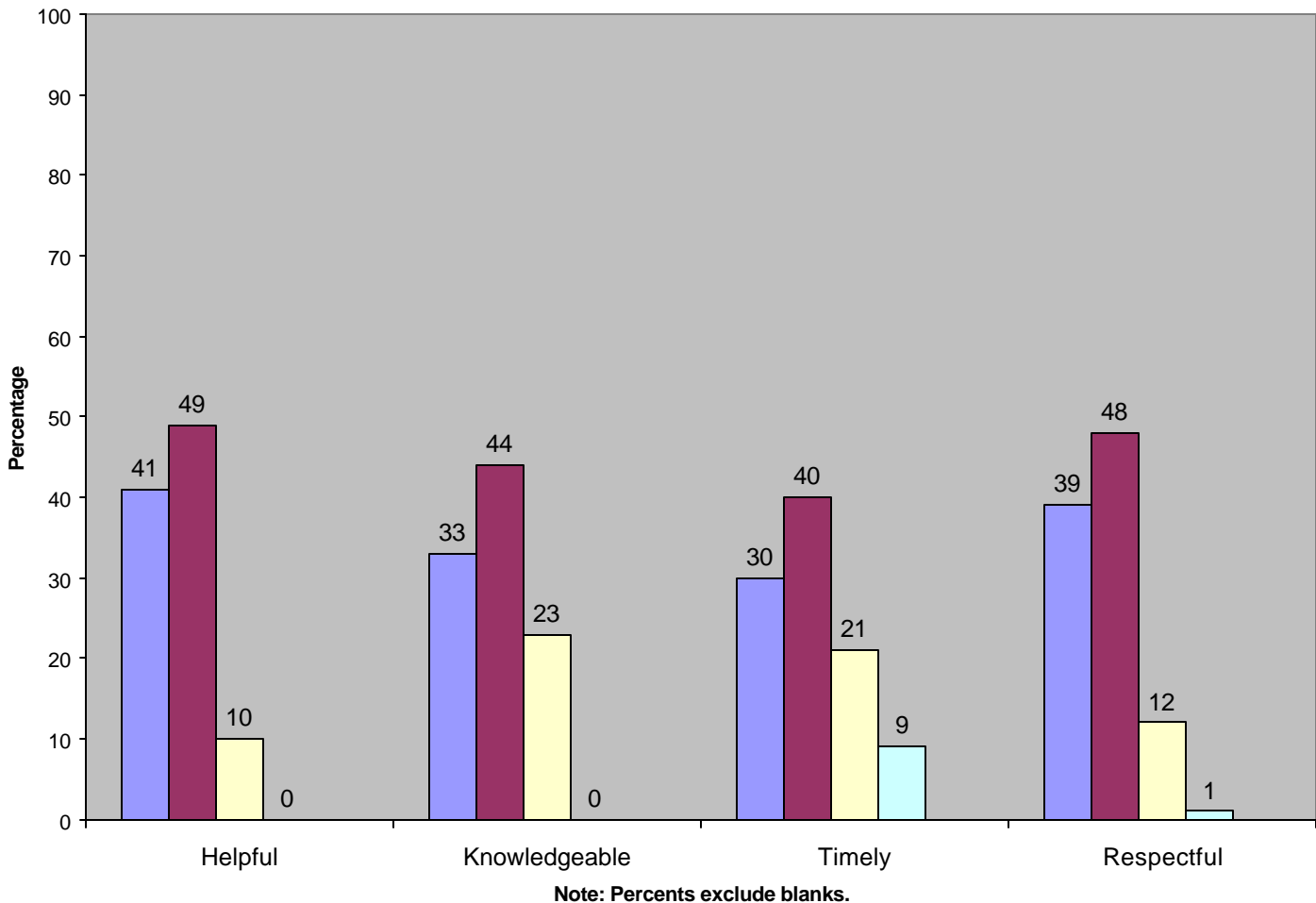
Figure 4: Rating of Clarity



WCD customer service

Customer service is very important to the Workers' Compensation Division. Processes are constantly being reviewed and improved to provide the best customer service possible. In order to measure success and determine areas for improvement, vocational consultants were asked to answer four customer service questions. Helpfulness of WCD staff was rated as excellent by 41 percent, good by 49 percent, and fair by 10 percent. No one rated helpfulness of staff as poor. The knowledge of staff in regard to the consultant's issue was rated excellent by 33 percent, good by 44 percent, and fair by 23 percent. No one rated it as poor. When asked how timely staff are in their response to the consultant, 30 percent rated it as excellent, 40 percent rated it good, 21 percent rated it fair, and 9 percent rated it poor. The final customer service question asked consultants to rate whether the staff treated them with respect. Thirty-nine percent marked excellent, 48 percent good, 10 percent fair, and 1 percent marked poor. (other 2%?)

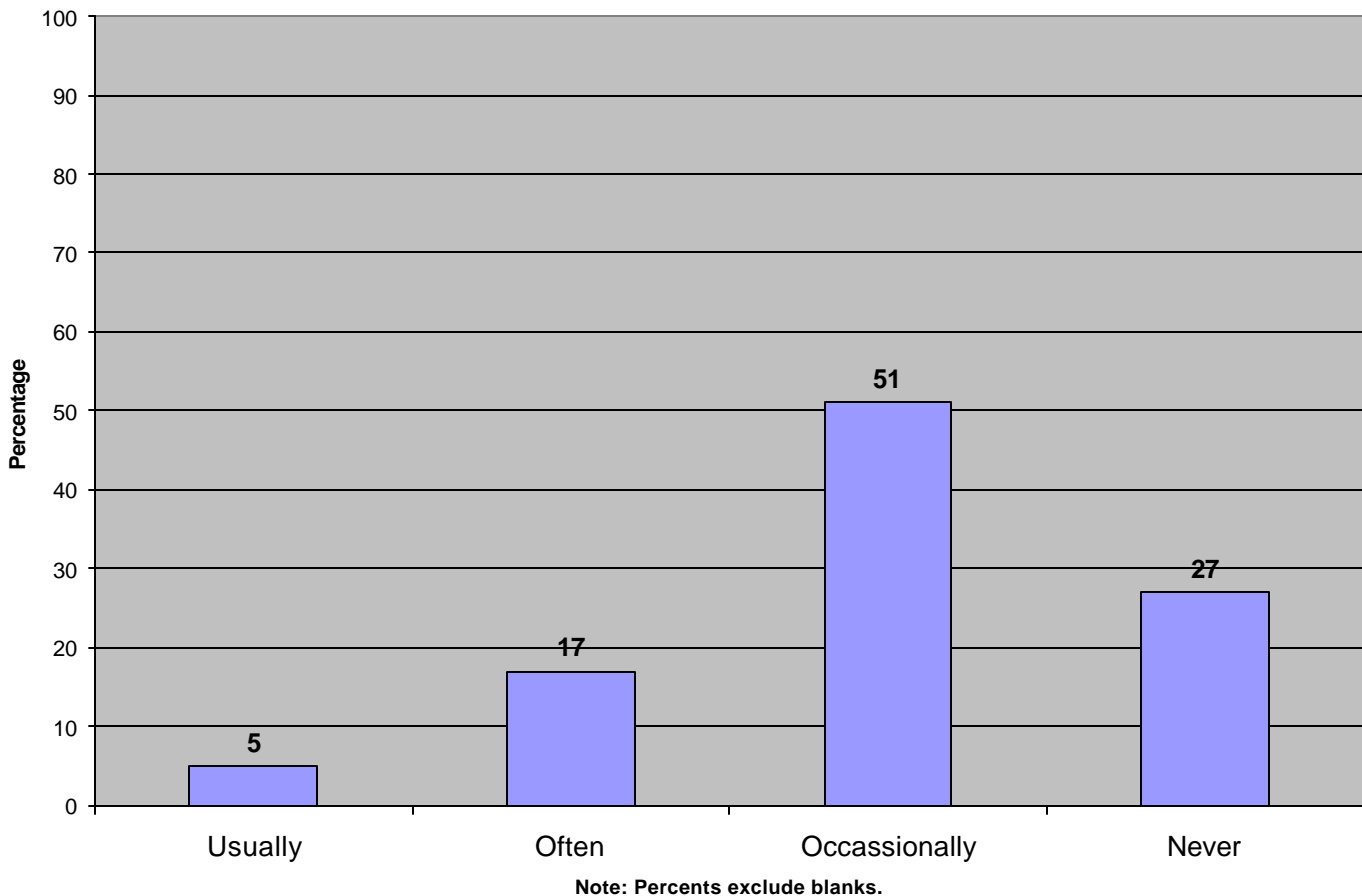
Figure 5: Quality of service WCD provides



Return to work programs and optional services

WCD has three return to work programs: the Employer-at-Injury program, the Preferred Worker program, and vocational assistance. The consultants were asked to indicate whether the complexity of eligibility and rules for these three programs is an obstacle to injured workers returning to work. Complexity was thought to *usually* be a problem by 5 percent. Another 17 percent rate it an obstacle *often*, while 51 percent said *occasionally*, and 22 percent believed it was *never* an obstacle (other 5%). Consultants were also asked to describe other obstacles they have encountered with these three return to work programs. Consultants identified a wide variety of other obstacles, including timelines for approval, complexity, and going through a separate Preferred Worker program eligibility process for a worker who has been found eligible for vocational services.

Figure 6: Is the complexity of eligibility and rules for the return-to work programs an obstacle to injured workers returning to work?



There are various kinds of optional services that vocational consultants may provide. These were frequently provided by 20 percent, sometimes by 31 percent, seldom by another 29 percent, and never by 20 percent. The most frequent circumstances under which consultants provided optional services included: at the request of either the insurer or employer, to workers who need assistance but don't qualify for services, and to assist workers in obtaining a GED. When asked what type of optional services are provided, 52 percent provided placement assistance, 25 percent provided brief training, and 23 percent provided other types of assistance. These other types of services included job analysis, early return to work, and worksite modification guidance.

Consultants were asked three questions about each of the return to work programs: what aspects of the program work well, what aspects don't work well, and what would improve the program.

For those who had used the Employer-at-Injury program, many answered that all aspects of the program work well. Specific aspects identified were wage subsidy, timely reimbursements, specific rules, worksite modification, the purchase of clothing, tools, and equipment, that program eligibility was well defined and had defined timeframes, the WCD audit program, and reimbursement for light duty wages. Auditing was identified as an aspect of the program that didn't work well. Consultants felt that it was subjective and too far after the fact. The paperwork and documentation was felt to be confusing, complex, and too rule intensive. When asked what they thought would improve the Employer-at-Injury program, consultants suggested more consistent interpretation of program rules, simplification of rules, more time to process the paperwork, a reduction in the paperwork required, and a more objective method of auditing.

Many of the consultants felt that all aspects of the Preferred Worker program worked well. Specific aspects identified included wage subsidy, the helpfulness and accessibility of the WCD vocational consultants, worksite modification, and premium exemption. As for what did not work well, most frequently mentioned was the length of time it takes for an on-site assessment. Other aspects that did not work well included the length of eligibility for program benefits, medical documentation requirements after claim closure, inconsistencies from employer to employer in the granting of benefits, and vendor selection. Many and varied suggestions were made for improving the Preferred Worker program. These included faster turn-around time from submitting the contract to the employer receiving reimbursement instructions, simplifying the rules for the employer, more public advertising about the program, particularly to employers, improving the Web site data to make it more comprehensive, and making the online forms more customer friendly.

When asked what aspects of the vocational assistance provided by WCD works well, the most frequent answer was all aspects and the accessibility of WCD vocational consultants and their helpfulness particularly with administrative rule interpretation. Other aspects identified were the Preferred Worker program, training on rules and their interpretation, and training. When asked what would improve vocational assistance provided by WCD, consultants listed, among other things, extending the length of time for training, establishing a timeline for the administrative review process, relaxing the eligibility rules so that low wage workers would be eligible, providing better clarification of the rules, and improving the Web site to provide better information.

Consultants provided a variety of suggestions for other services injured workers need in order to return to work. These included psychological counseling, assistance for low wage earners, less complicated and more consistent administrative rules, longer training programs for higher wage earners, requiring a vocational evaluation before a Claims Disposition Agreement is completed, information for Spanish speaking workers, penalties for malingering, more information provided to workers about their options, temporary child care assistance, and more publicity and outreach to employers to acquaint them with the return to work programs.

Appendix

Methodology

Since WCD certifies vocational counselors, a list of those currently certified was used as the survey population. WCD also attempted to reach return-to-work specialists of insurance companies. Insurers using the Employer at Injury program more than 100 times since 1997 were contacted to provide names of their employees who specialize in return-to-work. The total number of survey mailed was 378.

The first survey was mailed xxxxxxxx. A second mailing was completed xxxxxxxx. Out of the 378 mailed, 140 surveys were returned. Of the 140 who responded, 80 percent (114) were still involved in the workers' compensation system and completed the survey.

Next attach a copy of the survey with corrected typos!