

Device that tests workers' ability may save employers thousands of dollars

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A physical capacity test may someday become as common as drug tests for people applying for a job, as employers try to avoid losing money from false workers' compensation claims.

Earlier this month, **New Medical Health Care**, a physician-owned clinic on Wichita's west side, started using the Physical Capacity Profiling Testing System, a technology that can help determine if a potential employee has a pre-existing medical condition before the company hires them. It is the second such device in Wichita -- there's also one at Performance Assessment

Center at 1923 N. Webb Road. The product was developed by Occupational Performance Center in Salina.

The test takes 30 to 40 minutes. It goes beyond a routine physical by determining a person's strength and flexibility in the upper and lower body.

"If you want the job, you're going to try your best on the test," says physician Greg Lakin of New Medical.

The device has a "learning curve" simulating a person's range of motion and can help determine if an injury is faked, Lakin says.



Linda Downs, a patient at New Medical Health Care in west Wichita, demonstrates the Physical Capacity Profiling Testing System, which can help determine if a potential employee has a pre-existing medical condition before company hires them.

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"If you can't simulate that same amount of deficit, the same range, it indicates it's not a true injury," Lakin says. "If somebody's faking an injury, it will tell you, because they cannot replicate (the motion) three times, especially during the time they have to hold it (five to 10 seconds).

"People with an old injury who don't have health insurance will get a job, then when health insurance kicks in all of a sudden they'll get injured. They'll get treatment paid for, or they'll get disability."

Money Saved

New Medical, at 10525 W. 21st St. N., is one of many clinics used as a neutral party between employers and employees. The clinic ranks jobs on the level of physical effort they take, from level one (sedentary desk work) to four (construction worker), says Natalie Pangburn, workers' compensation coordinator.

"A commercial drywall installer is a four, so the machine calibrates to a certain level based on what their tasks will be," Pangburn says.

Janet Stubbs, administrator of the **Kansas Building Industry Workers Compensation** Fund in Topeka, says her organization, which also has a Physical Capacity Profiling Testing System, does the test for employers ranging from schools to nursing homes to casinos.

Stubbs says it's impossible to estimate how many thousands of dollars the device has saved employers from false worker's comp claims.

"It's a little like government affairs," Stubbs says. "If you lobby for something and want to get it done, or keep something from happening, there's no telling how much money it saves you. Often times when we can show the claimer (a pre-employment test), we are able to work a settlement without going before the courts."

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Stubbs says the test makes sense not only for the employers, but the people who get hired.

"If employees are not physically capable of doing the work, they're going to get injured," Stubbs says. "So this makes sense, avoiding putting someone in a position that they are not qualified physically to do.

"The chairman of my board has a union shop. We had the union steward come over and go through the test to see what we're doing and how we could protect his workers so they didn't miss work. He signed off on it."

Jim Davis, business manager and financial secretary of **International Brotherhood of Electric Workers Local Union 271** at 1040 S. Broadway, says he had not heard of the device. He says its members are asked in a questionnaire if they're able to perform to a physical standard.

"I'm thankful because I just don't think we have much (insurance fraud) going on," Davis says. "I do know there are people who go out there and get hurt outside of work, then go to work and try to file a worker's claim. That's fraudulent, and I'm all for catching those type of people."

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