

# Goodbye compo, hello valued employee

Aurenda provides a niche service for companies with significant workers' compensation premiums, and the benefits to companies are not just financial, as company founder and managing director Debbie Young explains to **Pamela Weatherill**.



Managing director and founder of Aurenda, Perth's only employer focused worker injury risk management service, Debbie Young makes the complex world of injury risk management feel a little less frightening.

"The key to successful management of workers' compensation is actually about understanding your worker. Not just employing them, but knowing them and understanding what they do. I think that sometimes employers are frightened by workers'

compensation because it can seem to be all about costs and fines and regulations – and to top it all off they have an injured worker. But really, if you can manage a healthy employee you can manage worker's comp."

"We need to say goodbye to the old compo mentality. At Aurenda, we use the 'looking after your employee approach' and believe me, there is a real impact in workplaces where employees know that if they have an injury they will be looked after," Debbie says.

Aurenda celebrated its fifth anniversary recently, and boasts partnerships with a range of companies throughout the public, private and not-for-profit sector in Western Australia, as a support service empowering employers to forge their way through the maze that is injury management and workers' compensation. Under Debbie's leadership, Aurenda developed its employer focused service by building employer confidence while also decreasing many of the tensions surrounding injury management.

"We work for, and with, employers to support their workers. We work with employers by training them and supporting them. We're the experts in injury management and the challenges of workers' compensation, and the employer is the expert about their worker and the work of the company. Together, we can get the best for everyone – the injured employee gets back to work where they want to be, insurance brokers see that claims can be kept down and the employer has the minimum disruption, cost and stress."

Anyone who has dealt with even simple workplace injuries and the compensation system will testify that it is pretty complex when you are dealing with multiple parties and what feels like conflicting agendas.

Debbie acknowledges that there might be around two percent of employees who will "try it on and make a bogus claim", but she strongly believes that if you run your risk management systems with integrity, credibility and consistency then everyone's a winner and employees are less likely to milk the system if it supports them.

When Debbie established Aurenda, she brought with her more than 10 years experience which included all the different aspects of workers' compensation. She has worked as a physiotherapist specialising in hand and limb injuries and physiotherapist for the then Fire and Rescue Services as well as working for a major insurance broker where she further built her knowledge base, networks and skills in dealing with the myriad of people who seem to be part of any workplace injury.

Debbie developed the work ethos, on which Aurenda is built today, of supporting the employer in such a way that relationships are forged, instead of working in an adversarial framework.

When you listen to Debbie's stories in her positive 'you can achieve anything really' way, the unexperienced could begin to think that injury management is a breeze.

When asked about the challenges in injury risk management, she concentrates again on the relationships between parties.

"The key is to step forward to the employee, and use the other agencies involved to help you support your employee. Most employers just don't know how to make the system work for them – and the legislation is always a useful backup.

"You hasten recovery when you see the whole person, their family, their co-workers and include everyone in the post injury programme. What many employers don't realise is that it's in everyone's interest to work together, and all parties involved in injury management are supported by the same principles and rules."

When asked about how she takes the fear out of injury management, Debbie's passion for people fully emerges.

"We support through education and training. We'll be the ones who say 'send flowers, pick up the employee and bring them in to work for light duties if they can't drive', but we are also the ones who show employers how to focus on and draw support from the big picture."

At the same time it seems that Aurenda does more than this. Supporting the employer and their company in other ways is a part of the service too. Debbie claims that "there are always people around to cheer and help you celebrate when things are going well. We try to be there for our companies when times are rough too. It's amazing what a difference it can make to someone if you simply show that you are thinking of them in the bad times too."

After passing the magic five year anniversary, Aurenda is obviously providing a niche service for companies with significant workers' compensation premiums, and the benefits to companies aren't just financial. Debbie claims that while the focus for most companies when they initially use Aurenda's services is financially driven, "they renew their contracts when they see the increase in staff and management morale, the lessened stress around injury management, and the building of positive relationships both within the company and with other parties."

While the forging and building of relationships is obviously a key to Aurenda's success, Debbie, a proud West Australian who gets involved with the community around her, says that for her it is, "all about having choice. I mean if you are lucky enough to live in WA then you have to be successful don't you? I didn't have a privileged upbringing by any means, but I had choice... No matter who you are here you can walk down the same beach, enjoy that sun and catch the same fish for dinner. In WA we've all got that."