

WORKPARTNERS Spotlight



INTERVIEW WITH ...

Carlos Luna

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Every month WorkPartners turns the spotlight on individuals making an impact and exemplifying excellence in the field of workers' compensation.

This month we sit down with Carlos Luna, a recognized thought-leader on national work comp issues.

Hello Carlos. You have been recognized as a thought-leader and a trusted advisor on national workers' compensation issues. You address a myriad of issues affecting workers' compensation at regional and national conferences. One area you seem very passionate about is employee advocacy in workers' compensation. Why does this mean so much to you?

Employee advocacy is important on a couple of different levels. Organizations that successfully adopt the employee advocacy approach in the management of their claims, either directly or via a third-party administrator, send a message to their workers – you matter, your wellness matters and that is our primary focus.

With numerous moving parts throughout the care and claim continuum, there is opportunity for things to go wrong that ultimately chip away at an injured worker's confidence that they have allies in their pursuit to get well again. The lower the confidence level, the more certain communication will eventually breakdown and litigation becomes imminent.

Employee advocacy is an approach that can be adopted by every stakeholder in the workers' compensation community. In my experience, advocating for the employee is also advocating for the employer. Their respective interests may appear disparate on the surface, but make no mistake, they have numerous interests in common.

Employee advocacy to me means placing these common interests (desire to expedite the delivery of medical care and return to productivity) on the table and agreeing to prioritize them with the understanding that if the employee wins, we all win.

What is your current role?

March marks my 10-month anniversary as Risico Total Managed Care's Vice President of Marketing and Business Development.

The role is a perfect blend of public affairs, brand building, and business development.

I was very fortunate to join an organization that had its bases covered with what I consider, top tier talent. Each of Risico's business verticals (Risico Insurance Services, Risico Claims Management, and Risico Total Managed Care) are steered by leaders that are forward thinkers and are very good at thinking outside the box to help our client base exceed their goals.

In a sense, Risico is a California workers' compensation's best kept secret. I have the awesome task of telling its story to a very captive audience. I love my job.

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WORKERS' COMPENSATION

From your perspective, what is the most common misconception regarding workers' compensation?

Workers' compensation is widely misunderstood, and for good reason – it's a very complex system with seemingly endless layers and processes. From my vantage point, the most common misconception is that workers' compensation is broken, denying injured workers benefits they rightly need and deserve. There is no question that a claim can be pushed into a path filled with friction, cost, and frustration for all stakeholders involved if not handled properly at various key intersections.

The California Workers' Compensation Institute (CWCI) researched medical review and dispute resolution outcomes in 2015. According to CWCI's published research, the study analyzed data from 5.6 million California workers' compensation medical services from 2014 and from nearly 220,000 Independent Medical Review (IMR) decision letters issued in 2014 to June of 2015.

The study found that 15.3 percent of medical services were requested using the State's request for authorization (RFA) process requiring Utilization Review (UR) approval for medical necessity. This confirms that nearly 85 percent of medical services in the study were approved and paid without undergoing UR.

Of the 15.3 percent of all medical services requested using RFA that underwent UR, 59.8 percent were accepted after non-physician reviewers determined the requests medically necessary pursuant to the MTUS treatment guidelines. The study further quantifies that of 5.6 million medical services, only 6.1 percent were reviewed by a UR physician.

CWCI's study asserts the modification/denial rate for the 6.1 percent of medical services reviewed by a UR physician was 70 percent, or 4.3 percent; 4.3 percent of the 5.6 million medical services in the study sample were modified or denied through the UR process,

making them eligible for IMR if the injured worker chose to dispute the UR decision.

Of the 4.3 percent of medical services that were modified/denied that were appealed, 10.9 percent were overturned by the IMR physician.

This, in addition to medical services where reimbursement was approved without going through UR or IMR, equates to an estimated approval rate between 95.7 percent and 96.1 percent for all California workers' compensation medical services.

Workers' compensation is an effective benefits delivery system in California. Are certain areas of the system due for modernization? No question. The system on the whole is working as it should.

What does the future of workers' compensation look like in California?

This is the million-dollar question!

California's workers' compensation system is as unpredictable as it is unique: A couple of years ago, California's Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC) made national headlines when it opted to adopt an evidence-based drug formulary that was the first of its kind – a condition-specific formulary.

The DWC made headlines again this month announcing that it essentially has underwritten the cost to access the commercial evidence-based treatment guidelines that make up California's Medical Treatment Utilization Schedule (MTUS) for all medical providers in the state. This is a game changer.

DWC Director George Parisotto and his team have been fervently working on identifying ways to simplify California's workers' compensation system. They've spent countless hours speaking with stakeholders and shareholders to ensure they take all vantage points into consideration as they craft the next round of changes.

I see California's DWC's investment and due diligence paying off. Specifically, I see a shorter path for injured workers to receive the treatment they need to return to productivity at home and at work. This will come as a result of increased use of the MTUS at the point of care.

In closing, we realize it can be tough at times balancing your career and life outside of work. How do you keep a healthy work/life balance?

This is a challenge for me. I'm often "plugged in" when I shouldn't be. It is a byproduct of passion I suppose. I don't recommend it.

I'm mostly able to shut down when I get to the gym. I've gotten much more consistent in my workout routine over the past couple of years after I got great advice from someone I hold in very high regard.

I've learned that good health is a great conduit for inspiration. I often have my best moments and ideas on the treadmill, or jogging a trail in the mountains of Colorado. Stay fit, stay inspired.



ABOUT CARLOS LUNA

Carlos Luna is VP of Marketing and Business Development for Risico Total Managed Care. A recognized thought-leader on national workers' compensation issues, Carlos' blogs have been published by industry-leading publications such as WorkCompCentral, WorkCompWire, Insurance Business Magazine, Louisiana Comp Blog, and more. Carlos was a key influencer in the state of California moving to update their MTUS treatment guidelines and adopting the state's drug formulary. Carlos was named a "New Leader in Workers' Compensation" by WorkCompWire in 2017.

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