

LOWER HUDSON/BRONX

# MDNEWS<sup>®</sup>

■ A BUSINESS & PRACTICE MANAGEMENT MAGAZINE | ABOUT PHYSICIANS | FROM PHYSICIANS | FOR PHYSICIANS ■



**Central Medical  
Services of Westrock:**  
A Valuable Partner for Occupational  
and Environmental Medicine Care

# Central Medical Services of Westrock:

## A Valuable Partner for Occupational and Environmental Medicine Care

By Jennifer Webster

NOW IN ITS 15TH YEAR, CENTRAL MEDICAL SERVICES OF WESTROCK, PC PROVIDES OCCUPATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL MEDICINE SERVICES TO PATIENTS, UNIONS AND BUSINESSES THROUGHOUT NEW YORK, SPECIALIZING IN THE NUANCES AND COMPLEXITIES OF WORKERS' COMPENSATION.



Michael Hearn, MD, MSc, CEO and President of Central Medical Services of Westrock, discusses diagnostic results during a follow-up visit and refers the patient for further care and treatment available at CMSW.

**A PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER** has one last appointment before 5 p.m. In 20 minutes, she'll be out the door to pick up her children from day care, she thinks. All she has to do is ascertain that her last patient, a bus driver, is managing his diabetes well. A careful man, this patient typically has his glucose under tight control.

After discussing his diabetes, he tells the physician about the back injury he sustained at work. When the power

steering failed, he had to turn the bus manually — and he felt something in his back tear. A week later, his back hurts worse than ever. He hopes his physician can resolve his back pain — and demystify his workers' compensation paperwork.

An hour later, the physician looks up from the last of the complex forms. She hopes she completed them correctly. She wants her patient to get the care he needs — and she wants to get out to her family.

### A Complex Care Situation

Patients seeking workers' compensation benefits have special needs and require attentive treatment. In addition to requiring sound medical care by physicians accustomed to treating traumatic and repetitive strain injuries and environmentally based illnesses, these patients present challenges unique to their economic and legal situations. Their physicians must serve not only as healers but also as advocates in an adversarial legal system, making their jobs doubly complex.



Matthew A.T. Clarke, MD, MBA, Medical Director of Central Medical Services of Westrock and Associate Professor at New York Medical College, has navigated this complexity for many years.

One fact he shares readily: A typical primary care physician (PCP) patient encounter takes 20 minutes. Each encounter with a workers' compensation patient entails 45–60 extra minutes of paperwork — or up to a 200 percent increase.

And, workers' compensation patients involve more than just extra work.

To start, they must rely on a different insurer from their usual payer, and that insurer looks to an independent medical examiner — rather than the patient's own physician — to approve or deny treatments.

"This can result in delays in care," Dr. Clarke says. "Physician-recommended treatments must be approved by the workers' compensation insurance carrier, which is in turn guided by the opinion of the independent medical examiner. This physician has no doctor-patient relationship with your patient and has been contracted to save the insurance carrier money. So he or she may be more likely to deem a treatment unnecessary or declare the patient's condition to be resolved or less serious than the treating physician has observed."

To obtain treatment, patients must often go to court and ask for a judgment approving treatment requested by their treating physician. When the independent medical examiner is at odds with their treating physician, the timeframe for approval may turn into months, as opposed to hours or days for a typical patient. Delayed treatment may result in minor conditions becoming more severe, and the physician then has to deal with an irate patient who feels he or she has received substandard care, Dr. Clarke says.

Additionally, many patients lose employment, some portion of their income and their normal health insurance while awaiting a decision. These factors may lead to economic distress, depression and the worsening of non-work-related health conditions.

"Many jobs have a time limit for which you can be out of work and still receive job-related benefits," Dr. Clarke says. "Whether 12 weeks under the Family Medical Leave Act or 12 months under

some union contracts, at the end of that time, patients may lose their major medical health insurance. Other conditions will no longer be treated, and family members may lose coverage as well. This adds to the emotional distress surrounding injury due to work-related conditions."

These factors can create confusion and frustration for PCPs as well. The solution: a practice dealing with a high volume of workers' compensation cases of all kinds. In New York, that practice is Central Medical Services of Westrock.

"We are skilled at navigating the system, and with our training in occupational medicine, a subspecialty of preventive medicine, we know how to address those issues so that your patient with a work-related condition can improve," Dr. Clarke says.

### Strong Capabilities in Occupational, Environmental Medicine

A multispecialty practice, Central Medical Services of Westrock has broad expertise, including:

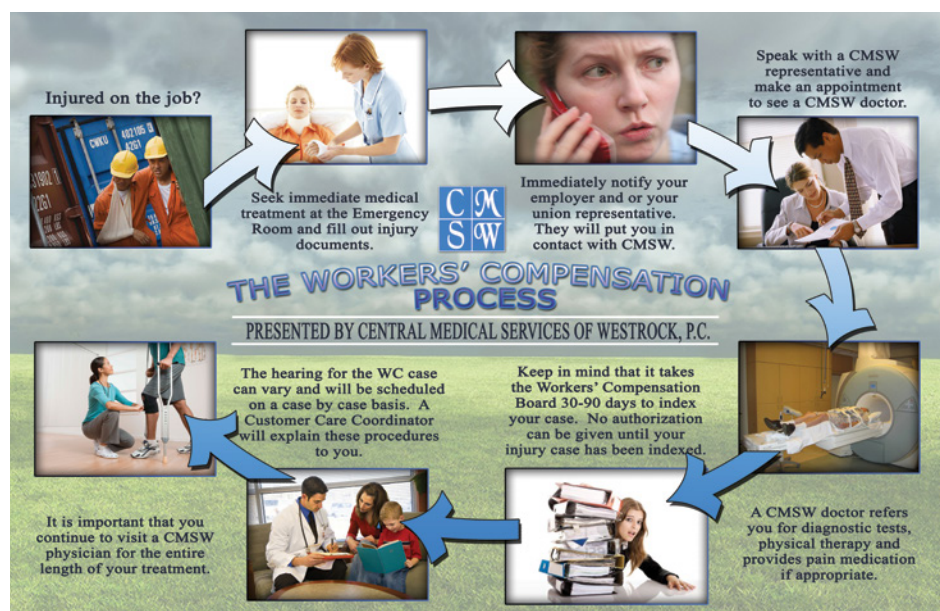
- + Acupuncture
- + Chiropractic care
- + Counseling services
- + Environmental medicine



Matthew A.T. Clarke, MD, MBA, Medical Director of Central Medical Services of Westrock and Associate Professor at New York Medical College

- + Functional evaluation testing
- + General occupational medicine
- + Orthopedic medicine
- + Neurology
- + Pain management
- + Physical therapy
- + Podiatry

The physicians associated with the practice are board-certified, and the non-physician practitioners are highly trained specialists who focus their practice on



Central Medical Services of Westrock simplifies the workers' compensation system for patients and their doctors.

## RAPID RESULTS

**“If patients are out of work due to a work-related injury, they are entitled to compensation and free medical care. Often, they do not receive any of these. Administratively, because they are unfamiliar with the necessary paperwork, and medically, because they are uncertain how to obtain authorization for their patients, primary care physicians find themselves stymied. So when patients come to us, they are at their wits’ end. Because we know the system very well and have deep expertise in occupational medicine, we get their situations turned around right away. They receive compensation, they are again able to meet obligations such as paying their rent, and they get the correct diagnosis and treatments so their health can improve and they can return to work. As a testimony, many of our referrals come from family members. Our work speaks for itself, and our patients speak for us.”**

— Michael Hearn, MD, MSc,  
CEO and President, Central  
Medical Services of Westrock

patients who have experienced injury or illness on the job. Together, this group of practitioners cares for a variety of work-related conditions. They most frequently see blunt force traumatic injuries, musculoskeletal disorders associated with repetitive strain, respiratory and dermatological disorders related to work-related exposures, and psychiatric conditions due to workplace trauma. Counselors also treat psychological issues that are sequelae of injury and unemployment.

“The cases we see can be divided into two categories — traumatic injuries and occupational disease,” says Michael Hearn, MD, MSc, CEO and President of Central Medical Services of Westrock. “Traumatic injuries most often include musculoskeletal conditions, such as broken bones, joint problems and soft-tissue damage, chronic strain injuries, such as epicondylitis, and entrapment syndromes, such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Occupational disease refers to illnesses resulting from on the job exposures. Common exposures include chemicals such as solvents, cleaners, paints, oil, dust, asbestos and multiple other sources. Additionally, our in-house psychologists treat psychological injuries incurred on the job.”

Patients find Central Medical Services of Westrock through many outlets. Emergency providers, internists and family care physicians refer patients with work-related conditions. Others self-refer due to the

practice’s excellent reputation. Still others come because unions and employers choose Central Medical Services of Westrock as their workers’ compensation point of reference.

Over the years, the physicians of Central Medical Services of Westrock have developed sturdy institutional relationships, giving them access to uniformly high-quality care for patients. Initial diagnosis and most treatment take place at Central Medical Services of Westrock, while physicians perform minor surgeries at local community hospitals and freestanding surgical centers. Physicians are on staff at North Shore-LIJ University Hospital at Forest Hills, and the most complex patient cases are cared for at tertiary research facilities.

For as long as they suffer outcomes of their work-related injury, patients stay with Central Medical Services of Westrock, receiving regular care aimed toward healing, improving quality of life, regaining employment and, when necessary, obtaining long-term disability benefits. Many develop lifelong relationships with their providers.

## Aggressive Pursuit of Patients’ Well-being

In addition to high-quality patient care, Central Medical Services of Westrock provides another important service: obtaining authorization and payment for the correct care for their patients, a



Dr. Clarke examines a patient with a work-related, repetitive-strain wrist injury.





Karen Hearn, RN, Executive President, and Dr. Hearn collaborate on the administrative and clinical operations for each of the Central Medical Services of Westrock's seven locations.

process that involves navigating a system of Byzantine complexity.

"Because 90 percent of our cases involve workers' compensation, we are skilled at filing the relevant paperwork and highly experienced at testifying in court," Dr. Clarke says. "We deliver sound testimony and have wonderful success rates in obtaining authorization for treatments for patients, as well as making sure they have compensation decisions that accurately reflect their degree of disability."

Due to the intricacy of the workers' compensation system, a single clerical mistake by a provider may cost patients valuable treatment options or necessary benefits, Dr. Clarke says. At Central Medical Services of Westrock, the administrative staff knows exactly how to complete the paperwork and take the correct steps to ensure patients receive the care they need.

"The system is adversarial and

## A MATTER OF TIME

Typical primary care  
patient encounter:

20 minutes

Workers' compensation  
patient encounter:

45–60 minutes

complex — it's not designed to make things simple for the injured worker," Dr. Hearn says. "The process is labor-intensive, creating what I call a 'hassle-factor' for treating physicians and patients, so that at the end of the day the injured worker cannot obtain what he or she needs."

Central Medical Services of Westrock does not accept that status quo. A care coordinator helps each patient negotiate the system's complexities, guiding the patient through paperwork filings, providing administrative support, and assisting with union and employer documentation.

"Our staff keeps up with calls to claims examiners, files papers and provides patients with their own documentation for court," Dr. Clarke says. "The system requires medical evidence of injury and disability. The workers' compensation insurer is looking to reduce its liability. We fight aggressively to ensure our patients receive the treatments they need."

## Creating Healthy Environments

Central Medical Services of Westrock is active in environmental medicine as well. The physicians are expert at treating

illnesses acquired from the environment in multiple ways, whether through mold from damp housing or chemical exposures from old landfills.

"Not everyone develops problems at work," Dr. Hearn says. "People can be at home, at a friend's house or at a shopping mall and be exposed to mold, chemicals or other environmental factors."

Trained in both occupational and preventive medicine, Dr. Clarke and Dr. Hearn work with patients, employers and the general public to prevent injury and illness.

"Prevention means a lot to us," Dr. Hearn says. "We give lectures for employees and in public forums about recognizing high-risk environments and mitigating risk factors that can lead to occupational or environmental injuries. We are very much involved in teaching — educating the public about health risks and screening them so we can detect environmentally related diseases at an early stage, before they progress."



Physical therapy is offered at several of the Central Medical Services of Westrock locations.

## THE PATH TO WORKERS' COMPENSATION

**IN NEW YORK STATE**, workers' compensation is a complex process — even before an employer or insurer approves or denies a claim.

- + 1. The patient suffers an injury or illness on the job.
- + 2. The patient's physician fills out a claims process form. This ideally takes place within two days of the injury.
- + 3. The patient has 30 days to report the injury to his or her employer. He or she

should make the report in writing.

- + 4. The employer reports the injury to the New York State Workers' Compensation Board and its workers' compensation insurance carrier within 10 days.
- + 5. The workers' compensation insurance carrier will likely require an independent medical examination.
- + 6. The patient fills out a claim form and mails it to the New York State Workers'

Compensation Board. This must take place within two years of the injury.

- + 7. Every 30 to 90 days, the patient's physician must submit a progress report on the patient's health to the New York State Workers' Compensation Board.
- + 8. If the patient's employer or the employer's workers' compensation insurance carrier denies the claim, the patient may appeal to the New York State Workers' Compensation Board.



Central Medical Services of Westrock's Management Team includes Matthew A.T. Clarke, MD, Medical Director; Karen Hearn, RN, Executive President; Michael Hearn, MD CEO; Aziza Abiodun, Office Administrator; and Ronald Latta, marketing.

### Co-Partners in Care

Although Central Medical Services of Westrock often develops long-term patient relationships, at no time do its physicians seek to replace or fill the roles of PCPs. Restricting their services to occupational and environmental medicine, they work hand-in-hand with providers in a synergistic relationship Dr. Hearn refers to as "co-management."

"Patients can have chronic medical problems, such as diabetes, and

work-related issues simultaneously," he illustrates. "Often, their PCPs would prefer not to testify in court or perform other tasks related to the work-related condition. We take that burden off their shoulders, so they can do what they do best, which is to treat their patients' non-work-related issues."

*To refer a patient to an occupational or environmental specialist familiar with workers' compensation cases, please visit [www.cmswpc.net](http://www.cmswpc.net).* ■

## IN YOUR PATIENTS' CORNER

"Referring physicians need to understand that workers' compensation is an adversarial system. Providers must be ready to fight for their patients — because they will have to. On one side, the employer, the workers' compensation insurance company and the independent medical examiner will work to limit liability. On the other side, the patient and his or her physician, union and attorney are working to make sure he or she gets the right treatment. The workers' compensation system — the New York State Workers' Compensation Board and the judges — stands in the middle as referee. We want referring physicians to understand this process should not be taken lightly. Workers' compensation patients require a lot of treatment, even while the physician fights an uphill battle to secure insurance approval. As specialists with years of experience, we make it our business to fight for your patients."

— Matthew A.T. Clarke, MD, MBA, Medical Director, Central Medical Services of Westrock; Associate Professor, New York Medical College

### WHERE TO FIND US

**PHYSICIANS MAY REFER** patients to a Central Medical Services of Westrock, PC via the corporation office (718-797-9111) or directly through one of these office locations:

#### BRONX

2510 Westchester Ave., Suite 206  
Bronx, NY 10461

#### BROOKLYN

111 Livingston St., Suite 1901  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

#### LONG ISLAND

121 Eileen Way  
Syosset, NY 11791

#### LONG ISLAND

239 E. Main St.  
Patchogue, NY 11772

#### LONG ISLAND

40 E. Main St.  
Bayshore, NY 11706

#### ORANGE COUNTY

5020 Route 9, Suite 103  
Newburgh, NY 12584

#### QUEENS

118-35 Queens Blvd., Suite 900  
Forest Hills, NY 11375

#### WHITE PLAINS

245 Main St., Suite 600  
White Plains, NY 10601