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Issue: November 19, 2018

CEOCFO Magazine

Q&A with Marijo Storment, CEO of The ALARIS Group, Inc providing Case Management and Related Services in the Worker's Comp arena to Third-party Administrators, Worker's Compensation Insurance Carriers, and Employers

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CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Ms. Storment, what is the ALARIS Group?

Ms. Storment: The ALARIS Group primarily provides case management and case management related services in the Worker's Comp arena. ALARIS is owned by Paradigm Outcomes and is part of the Paradigm family of companies.

CEOCFO: Who is using your services and how do people come upon ALARIS?

Ms. Storment: Our services are primarily used by third-party administrators, Worker's Compensation insurance carriers, and employers, depending on the services that they access from us.

CEOCFO: Would you give us an idea of the range of services?

Ms. Storment: The most prominent service that we provide is Medical Case Management. We employ nurses and sometimes occupational therapists. We actually work hand-in-hand with the employer, the insurance carrier and the injured worker to ensure that their diagnosis is accurate, ensuring that they have a treatment plan, and helping that worker transition back to a productive life including return to work. We work closely with all those parties on a claim.

CEOCFO: Does how you work a case depend on what side you are representing?

Ms. Storment: Depending on who pays for our service, is there a difference? I would say no. We are an advocate for the injured worker and we are advocates for the truth. Our goal is to work hand-in-hand with healthcare professionals to try to advance the healing process for injured workers as quickly as possible. A lot of that is making sure the injured worker is being treated by the right doctor, making sure the diagnosis is accurate, making sure they have a treatment plan that is consistent with the correct diagnosis, and as they do transition back to work that they transition back to normal activities of daily living and doing it appropriately and safely so that they do not reinjure or exacerbate a condition.

CEOCFO: Where do you fit in between the doctor and patient?

Ms. Storment: Oftentimes we are a liaison between the two. We serve as an educator for the injured worker. We actually attend the visit with the physicians, and sit in during the appointments with them and usually prepare with the injured worker prior to going into the doctor's office. We talk with them about their concerns and current symptoms. Sometimes people are afraid to ask questions and sometimes when they do ask and physicians answer the answer is hard to understand. Other times the injured worker's life is in a state of turmoil which makes it harder for the individual to not only understand what a physician is saying but to translate the physician's advice into their next step to aid their recovery. At times following through afterward a physician appointment is not a matter of an injured worker not wanting to be

compliant, sometimes it is just a matter of an injured worker needing reassurance and understanding regarding what the physician is actually saying. Oftentimes we are a reinforcement of what the physician is recommending. We are educators allowing injured workers to be more successful with the treatment plan that is prescribed.

CEOCFO: *Are workers comfortable with an outside person coming in with them to the doctor's office?*

Ms. Storment: It is interesting because most of the injured workers very much welcome the assistance. The Worker's Compensations system can be intimidating and complicated. Having somebody that you can develop a relationship with and help you navigate through the system with is very helpful. Having said that, not every person wants that type of involvement from us, so there are modifications we can make. For example, maybe the injured worker does not want us to sit through the exam portion with a physician. After the exam the physician calls us in and we participate in the conversation. Some people are much more comfortable with the medical community and feel don't feel like they need an advocate, and some people are thankful for it. There is a variety but by and large we are positively received.

"The Worker's Compensations system can be intimidating and complicated. Having somebody that you can develop a relationship with and help you navigate through the system with is very helpful." - Marijo Storment, RN, BSN, CCM

CEOCFO: *Are most of the doctors in the Worker's Comp area familiar with outside parties involved?*

Ms. Storment: Most doctors that actively treat Work Comp injuries are very familiar with the case management process, and welcome the assistance of the case manager. At times, the physician is happy for the liaison as well. We become a third set of eyes and ears in that exam room. We communicate back to an employer for example, about what an injured worker is physically capable of doing upon return to work, there is oftentimes a higher level of comfort that an injured worker will be provided a work environment that they will not push them beyond what they are physically capable during recovery. sometimes the opposite is true. We can be a voice for the employer in that doctor's office. Sometimes the doctor appreciates that an injured worker might have the impression right or wrong that they cannot go back to work unless they can lift that 75 pound bag of grain. We might be able to explain that we actually went and visited the job site and spoke to the employer and we can very easily make a modification and have somebody else do that 75 lb. lift as long as they can lift 10 lbs. on an occasional basis. This allows for the injured worker to return to work safely while they are recovering. The physician appreciates that because in today's healthcare, being active and participatory in your recovery is proven to shorten the recovery overall and results in better outcomes. Having a safe and appropriate place for an injured worker to return to and be active really does promote better outcome.

CEOCFO: *Are you ever hired on a contractual basis? What is the business side?*

Ms. Storment: When providing telephonic or in person, which we call Field Case Management, we are brought in on more complex claims, whether they are medically complex or whether there is an issue surrounding work that is complex. We are usually not brought in on something where someone needs stitches and goes back to work on Monday. Having said that, we also have another product that is called our 24/7 Nurse Triage product. That is where we have nurses that sit in a call center 24/7 365 days a year answering calls from injured workers at the time of injury. Often the injured worker and supervisor call into the nurse triage line together to discuss an injury immediately following the incident. They talk to a nurse on the phone reviewing the mechanism of injury, the current presentation, and a short health history. The nurse uses what are called triage protocols or evidence-based medicine to make a determination whether or not this injured worker needs to be seen or if the injury can be treated with minor first aid. If there is a need for this injured worker to be seen by a health care provider then we also help get them to the right level of care whether it is an occupational health clinic, an ER, an urgent clinic or if they can be seen by their primary care physician tomorrow. We help them at the time of injury. When involved in that product, we are actually working with all levels of injury and everything from maybe some fluid in the eye or a splash of chemical in the eye, to a bee sting, to something very serious such as a low-back injury, amputation or some type of serious or catastrophic injury. We get all levels of injury.

CEOCFO: *Is that a growing area for you?*

Ms. Storment: It is. In addition to doing telephonic triage, we also have the capability to do telepresence triage, which means an injured worker can access the nurse via a HIPAA compliant, secure video feed so that the nurse and the injured worker can talk to each other and also see one another. There are some additional benefits to having the ALARIS nurse have eyes on that patient and eyes on that wound, or oh my gosh I think I sprained my wrist, let's take a look at it. We can visualize swelling, bruising, and we can tell the injured worker they have the ice in the wrong spot when we are using the telepresence mechanism. We can also engage a telemedicine physician into the encounter with the injured worker where we start a triage call on the phone or through our telepresence platform. We can bring a telemedicine physician into that

encounter immediately, so the injured worker would never have to leave their place of employment. They would not have to find a ride to go to a clinic, or if it is late at night or night shift when there is not much open except an emergency room. One of the large employers that we work with allows their employee population to use our services for personal health instances as well. They have a population of people that travel on construction projects, so they are often away from home, and they feel it is a nice benefit to offer their employees. If they are out on the road and get pink-eye, where do they go? If they get a cold, they can call the 24/7 nurse triage line anytime day or night and whether it is an occupational injury or a personal health injury, we triage it and say these are the things we recommend and you do or do not need to be seen by a medical health provider. We can either find a local provider for them, or we can engage a telemedicine physician for them right away. It is a great service and employers and employees love it. It allows their employees to be touched right away by a nurse and have an objective assessment on that injury. That injured worker is also able to call that nurse back multiple times, even days later for questions or concerns about their injury or treatment.

CEO CFO: *When you are managing a case with more of a physical presence, what is your geographic range and how much do you need to understand about a particular state's Worker's Comp?*

Ms. Stormont: The good news is that ALARIS has the ability to service injured workers throughout the country. We have a wide geographical range. Each state has its own nuances in Worker's Compensation, its own statutes and laws. The practicing case manager needs to have a thorough understanding of the Worker's Compensation statutes and laws in the states they are practicing. We also have multiple people within the enterprise that are dedicated to corporate compliance that aides our understanding of those state statutes and laws and making sure that we are operating within them. Some states have specific laws like the State of Minnesota which has QRC statutory rehab rules. We are very much aware of those rules and work closely with each state to be in compliance.

CEO CFO: *We came upon ALARIS Group as a Top Workplace. Was the workplace environment a deliberate strategy from the beginning or develop over time? Does that help attract nurses who have so many opportunities?*

Ms. Stormont: Nurses do have lots of opportunity these days. The overall job market is extremely competitive. Being a Top Workplace is something we are very proud of. It is something that is very deliberate for us. We try to create a culture that attracts and retains top talent in our industry. We try to build a place where people feel valued and supported. This is a bit harder as, most of our case managers work virtually out of their homes. They work very autonomously. We have nurses from Albany, New York to San Diego, and sometimes it feels a little isolating. Building a workplace culture that draws people in and allows them multiple opportunities to engage is always one of our top three strategic initiatives for the company. It is deliberate and, there is a lot of attention placed on this initiative. We do think it helps us draw in talent, not just the fact that we have the award but people here experience and feel that culture. We want people to come in and go through our orientation process and say wow I am in the right place, I feel supported here, I feel valued here, I feel like I can do my best work for my injured workers here.