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Workers' Compensation Law Blog
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Complex Regional Pain Syndrome: It's Real!

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Formerly called RSD (*reflex sympathetic dystrophy*), CRPS (complex regional pain syndrome) is a type of pain thought to be caused by an injury or abnormality in the nerve pathway. It typically causes a burning sensation, and hypersensitivity to touch somewhere in the arms or legs. If not treated early, it may spread from one limb to another. This diagnosis strikes terror in the hearts of adjusters, because the length of time the claimant will need treatment is unpredictable.

CRPS has always been a controversial medical diagnosis, with the AMA Guides authors taking the view that scientifically, there is no discernable cause of this pain. The doctors who contribute to the Guides Newsletters suggest that there is an overriding psychological component to CRPS as opposed to an identifiable, underlying physical nerve problem. Essentially, the national doctors who are establishing the rules for rating permanent impairment question whether CRPS is a real health condition or a form of malingering.

Not a lot has changed over the years as to how injured workers with the diagnosis of complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) are treated. After months of trying to get an accurate diagnose of their pain complaints, the injured worker must then grapple with a component of the workers' compensation medical community' that views CPRS as a fictional illness that is encouraged by lawyers.

I am not a doctor, and cannot diagnose anyone with anything. That said, however, I can say from personal experience that I have had, and continue to have, clients who are hard-working, sane people who have this dreadful, very real pain disorder. I have observed that the sooner the injured worker is assigned to a physician who is experienced in treating CPRS, the better the chances for a successful reduction in pain and return to full function. For more information on diagnosis and treatment, please review the [National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke](#) fact sheet.

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