

Working with Chronic Illness
Success When Facing Health Challenges in the World of Work

June 17, 2017 Center for Chronic Illness

Joe Stuckey, MS, CRC
University of Washington Medical Center
Rehabilitation Counselor

Focusing on...

Impact of chronic illness on work
Disclosure: when & how
Job challenge: what to do
Americans with Disabilities Act
Vocational rehabilitation
Work – Life balance

Value of Employment

Quality of life
Maintenance of identity
Physical & emotional health
Financial security
Healthcare benefits

Change in employment status negatively impacts individual & family
Workers with chronic illness often face chronic uncertainty about changes in health and impact on employment.

Employment Challenge is often unreported to healthcare providers

- Assume work difficulties unrelated to health
- Minimize the importance of events
- Feel embarrassed to admit work problems
- Denial of symptom progression work impact
- False sense of employment protection due to misunderstanding of disability rights
- Challenge reported in employment crisis

Impact of Chronic Illness

- Job performance challenge
 - Loss of productivity
 - Absenteeism
- Negative feedback from employers & coworkers (*value diminished*)
- Disciplinary action
- Resignation or early retirement
- Fear of job termination

Questions to consider

- *Have you noticed changes in your ability to meet work demands?*
- *Have you received negative feedback on your job performance from your employer or co-workers?*
- *Do you make more errors?*
- *Does it take you longer to complete tasks?*
- *Do you miss work, arrive late or leave early? If so, how often?*
- *Do your health symptoms make it difficult to perform your job duties?*
- *Have you reduced or eliminated activities after work or on weekends due to fatigue?*
- *Do you work longer hours to accomplish job tasks?*
- *Are you considering changing jobs, reducing your hours or quitting work?*
- *Are you concerned about your ability to continue working in the future?*
- *Do you have questions about disability rights, job accommodations or modifications?*
- *Do you have questions about how to talk to your employer about your disability?*

Employment & Chronic Illness

What you need to know

Question: *Should I tell my employer about my disability?*

- Simple answer: NO
- Consider purpose of disclosure *Obligated, Support, Understanding*
- Attention on medical condition rather than employment activity
- Disability discrimination
- Value of employee diminished

Guidelines for Disclosure

Under no legal obligation to disclose health information:

Job interview, hiring or employment

Diagnosis or symptom change

Only when exercising disability rights:

Job accommodation/modification (ADA)

Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

Question: *Can my employer fire me if I have a disability?*

✓ YES

Must meet essential job demands

Poor performance

- Discipline
- Termination
- Loss of medical
- No access to Short/Long-term Disability benefits

✓ Early Intervention

When employee is at risk

Contact healthcare team

Request medical leave of absence

- Use FMLA
- Short-term Disability
- Medical care

→ Employment Support

Family & Medical Leave Act

- Provides 12 work weeks of unpaid leave
- Protects job and health insurance benefits
- Leave options: Continuous or Intermittent
- Eligibility requirements:
 - ✓ Serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of the job
 - ✓ Employer ≥ 50 employees
 - ✓ Employee worked ≥ 12 months
 - ✓ Employee worked ≥ 1,250 hours past year

Question: What are my employment rights?

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Federal civil rights protection for individuals with disabilities
- Prohibits employment discrimination
- Employer ≥ 15 employees (ADA)
- Employer ≥ 8 employees (WA)

Question: What are my employment rights?

- Must be qualified for the job
- Able to perform essential functions *with or without accommodation*
- Employer required to provide reasonable accommodation unless impose an undue hardship

ADA Definitions

Disability: Physical or mental impairment. Substantially limits ≥ 1 major life activity.

Essential Functions: Tasks that are fundamental job duties.

Undue Hardship: Changes too costly, impractical or fundamentally alter the business operation.

Reasonable Accommodation: Modification to job or work environment.

Employer not required to:

- Eliminate essential functions
- Create new jobs
- Lower production standards

ADA Responsibilities

Employee

- Inform employer of need
- Offer specific solutions

Employer

- Determine if reasonable
- Choose effective option

Practical Guidelines

- Put all accommodation requests in writing
- Be specific: Do not describe all symptoms
- Symptom → Accommodation → Resolution
- Risk of “medical restrictions” → termination
- Must meet all essential job demands

- Permanent: as long as the need exists
- Private: not disclosed to co-workers
- Accommodation ≠ Employment privilege
- Employers can request additional medical information.
- Do not release medical records to employer
- Use physician letter or employer forms

Job Accommodation: Physical Capacities

- Building, stairs, parking
- Workstation location
- Location: printer, fax, restroom
- Mobility: scooter, wheelchair
- Arm supports, book holder
- Ergonomic tools
- Eliminate non-essential tasks
- “Temporary” modifications
- “Temporary” light duty

Job Accommodation: Fatigue

- Rest breaks, nap
- Mobility: scooter, wheelchair
- Eliminate non-essential tasks
- Workstation location
- Location: printer, fax, restroom
- Flexible schedule
- Work from home
- Schedule high demands tasks at peak energy times
- Self-paced workload

Job Accommodation: Pain

Accessibility

- Building, stairs, parking

Workstation design

- Ergonomic chair, stool
- Sit/stand desk

Equipment

- Keyboard, mouse, headset
- Word recognition software

Schedule

- Shift change (night to day)
- Additional break time

Physical demands

- Eliminate non-essential task
- Alternate sit/stand/walk

Job Accommodation: Temp Sensitivity

- Climate control office

- Fan, heater
- Modify dress code
- Cooling vest
- Limit outdoor exposure
- Flexible work schedule
- Work from home

Job Accommodation: Vision

Larger computer monitor

- Lighting
- Breaks to rest eyes
- Note taker
- AT: Magnification, high contrast, screen reading

Job Accommodation: Bowel & Bladder

- Workstation near restroom
- Additional break time

Job Accommodation: Attention

Minimize distractions

- Visual & Noise
- Noise canceling headset
- Workstation location
- Private office

Single task focus

Reduce interruptions

- Close door, post sign
- Reshape behaviors

Organization

- Reduce clutter
- File system

Job Accommodation: Memory

- Notes, recording device
- Schedule, organization system
- Alarms, reminders, smart-phone
- Written instructions
- Checklists
- Communication via email
- Minutes from meetings

Job Accommodation Network

Job Accommodation for People with Cognitive Impairment

- Minimize distraction
- Noise canceling headset
- Written instructions
- Daily To-Do lists

- Email communication
- Organizational strategies
- Alarms & reminders
- Recording devices
- Additional rest breaks
- Flexible schedule
- Work from home
- Reduced work hours
- Supervision / job coach
- “Language of fatigue”

Job Accommodation Network

Job Accommodation for People with Speech-Language Impairments

- Written or computer based communication
- Email or text
- Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC)
- Text Telephone Communication (TTY)
- Speech amplifier
- Work from home
- Sensitivity training
- AT

Job Accommodation Network

Job Accommodation for People with Mental Health Impairments

- Relaxation techniques
- Quiet area, away from overstimulation
- Workstation location
- Private office
- Reduce distractions
- Contact with support team
- Support animal
- Assign a mentor
- Flexible work schedule
- Modified breaks
- Make up missed time
- Organizational supports

Job Accommodation Network

Job Accommodation for People with Motor Limitations from Stroke

- Mobility supports
- Speech recognition software
- Building access, elevator, parking
- Sit / stand workstation
- Longer break times
- Workstation location
- Location: printer, fax, restroom
- Ergonomic chair
- Arm supports, book holder

- Ergonomic tools
- OT & AT

Question: What are my educational rights?

- ADA & Section 504 Rehab Act
- Meet admission requirements
- Unable to waive essential curriculum
- Disclosure required
- Register with Disability Services
- Provide medical documentation
- Understand needs and propose accommodations
- Self-monitor needs & request changes

Disability Services Office

- Accessible classroom location
- Priority / early registration
- Note takers or recordings
- Early access to materials
- Extended time (tests/assignments)
- Testing – reduce distraction
- Office time with instructor
- Assistive technology
- E-books or audio books
- Accessible dorms (air conditioning)

Interdisciplinary Approach for Chronic Illness

Interdisciplinary Team

- ✓ Early referral for interdisciplinary care increases work outcomes
- ✓ Work barriers & solutions may not be apparent in clinic visit
- ✓ Collaborative care: identify barriers, develop job supports & make informed decisions

Vocational Rehabilitation

Employment Support

Rehabilitation Counseling

- Counseling for individuals, families & groups:
- Impact of health on employment & education
- Evaluate strengths, functional limitations & goals
- Medical, physical, psychological & cognitive status
- Adjustment to disability

Understanding of medical & psychosocial aspects of disabilities & health conditions

Rehabilitation Counselors are professional counselors educated and trained specifically to serve individuals with disabilities.

- Commission on Rehabilitation Counseling Certification (CRCC)

WA State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Serve people with disabilities who want to work but face substantial barriers to finding or keeping a job.

- Training, education, AT & some medical services
- Community based assessments (CBA)
- Job seeking skills
- Job placement
- Self-referral process
- Rehab Counselors work collaboratively with DVR

Economy of Resources

- ❖ Work ♦ School
- ❖ Home ♦ Family ♦ Social
- ❖ Health maintenance
- ❖ Self-care
- ❖ Sleep
- ❖ Medically indicated exercise
- ❖ Recreation ♦ Vacation
- ❖ Activity pacing ♦ Breaks
- ❖ Time management, “boundary” management
- ❖ Old patterns ♦ New tools
- ❖ Budget: track spending
- ❖ Resource Allocation

Work Values Checklist

What matters to you most in a job?

- Current assessment of the most important factors in work-life balance
- Intrinsic Values: intangible rewards, motivation, satisfaction (*variety, helping others, innovation, environment*)
- Extrinsic Values: tangible rewards, conditions (*salary, benefits, job title, flexible schedule, travel, commute time*)
- Lifestyle Values: how you live (*resources for exercise, family, down-time, health maintenance*)
- Identify Top 5 → Guide Career Choices

Work – Life Balance

Take stock of your current situation

- ✓ Financial health (budget, lifestyle change, future)
- ✓ Health maintenance (medical, exercise, breaks)
- ✓ Daily activities (keep a record: track energy, time, tasks)

Reality based planning: Be Honest

- ✓ Run all plans through a “reality filter”
- ✓ Be aware this can be an emotionally difficult process (limitations, hopes, dreams, identity)
- ✓ Be open to new approaches, strategies & supports

Give it a trial run

- ✓ Build your daily schedule as if you were _____.
- ✓ Build in daily activities, breaks, meals, driving, etc.
- ✓ Use a daily planner to both plan and record.

Benefits of Volunteering

- Trial run for employment

- Establish a routine
- Develop work supports
- Evaluate work-life balance
- *Set up schedule as if “working”*
- *“Best time of day” for tasks*
- *Full v. Part-time*
- *Evaluate activity consistency*
- *Assess if symptoms change*
- *Maintain self-care practices*
- *Make an informed decision about work*
- Explore interests
- Learn something new
- Productive activity
- Social engagement
- Obtain current reference
- Transition to paid employment

Employment Exit Strategy

Take stock of your current situation

- ✓ Financial health (budget, lifestyle change, future)
- ✓ Benefits (medical & disability insurance, retirement)
- ✓ Health maintenance (medical service, exercise, self-care)
- ✓ Daily activities (keep a record: track energy, time, tasks)

Reality based planning: Be Honest

- ✓ Talk to your medical team about job difficulty
- ✓ Run all plans through a “reality filter”
- ✓ Be aware this can be an emotionally difficult process (limitations, hopes, dreams, identity, adjustment)
- ✓ Be open to new approaches and changes
- ✓ Consider life goals beyond work

When Facing Job Challenge

- Don't panic
- Take deep breaths – approach calmly, rationally
- Engage in problem solving
- Explore options
- Do not immediately quit, change jobs or reduce hours
- Do not disclose health info
- Consider level of urgency
- *Are you the only one aware?*
- *Negative feedback?*
- *Facing discipline or termination?*
- Seek guidance from healthcare team
- Share level of urgency
- Interdisciplinary approach
- Evaluation may be needed

- Treatment options may improve difficulty
- Collect information: Impact of changes on income and benefits
- Get personal – take an individual approach
- Use helpful employment resources
- Explore compensatory strategies
- Consider job accommodations
- When possible, make changes independently

Employment Resources

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

www.dshs.wa.gov/dvr/ (Washington)

www.oregon.gov/DHS/vr (Oregon)

www.vr.idaho.gov (Idaho)

labor.state.ak.us/dvr/ (Alaska)

Department of Services for the Blind

www.dsb.wa.gov

Department of Justice

www.ada.gov/

Family & Medical Leave Act

www.dol.gov/whd/fmla/index.htm

Employment Resources

Job Accommodation Network

askjan.org

Northwest ADA Center

nwadacenter.org

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

www.eeoc.gov

WA Assistive Technology Act Program

watap.org

WorkSource

<https://worksourcewa.com/>