

Employment of People With Multiple Sclerosis

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UNT-WISE Webinar Presentation

Introduction

- This discussion will focus on multiple sclerosis (MS), a disability whose nature and impact creates extraordinary challenges to employment. The discussion will include:
 - Description and incidence
 - Manifestation and functional limitations
 - Effects on employment
 - Attitudes towards employment
 - Benefits of employment
 - Challenges
 - Accommodations
 - Alternative employment
 - VRC roles

Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

- Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic, often disabling disease of the central nervous system.
 - Brain
 - Spinal cord
 - Optic nerves
- Demographics
 - More common among people of northern European ancestry
 - More women than men affected
 - Most diagnoses between age 20 to 50
- Incidence
 - 2.5m worldwide
 - 1m in USA

MS and Employment

- High unemployment rate
 - 90% are employed at diagnosis
 - 30% are working five years after diagnosis
- Desire to work among PwMS
 - A primary unmet need
 - 75% of those unemployed would like to work
 - About 50% did not want to stop working or change jobs
 - 58% did not want to reduce work
- Reasons for unemployment
 - Functional limitations
 - Misinformation/Lack of information

Benefits of Working

- Why do PwMS want to work?
 - Self actualization
 - Self accomplishment
 - Independence
 - Economic/Social
 - Quality of life
 - Emotional, social, physical, wellbeing
 - Identity
 - Social relationships
 - Psychological
 - Meaning/Purpose
 - Mental health

Challenges to Employment

- Nature of disease
 - Common MS symptoms pose significant limitations
 - Vision
 - Speech
 - Mobility
 - Fatigue
 - Bladder/bowel control
 - Cognition
 - Unpredictable course
 - Unpredictable flare-ups and remissions
- Presence of (MS) triggers
 - Stress, Heat, Fatigue, Infections

Challenges to Employment Pt. 2

- Employment Policies
 - Poor or no disability benefits
 - Part-time/Full-time hour requirements
 - Employer unwilling/unable to provide accommodations
- Lack of Planning
 - Failure to anticipate and prepare for disease progression
- Lack of Support
 - Person with MS does not seek help on time
 - State agency may not have the needed funds

Accommodations

- Flexible schedule
 - Allow for atypical work hours if possible
 - Non-rigid attendance requirements
 - Allow Telecommuting
- Modified Duties
 - Low stress, non-urgent tasks
 - Consider disease limitations
- Flexible Workplace
 - Allow PwMS to consider alternative positions
 - Allow/Provide additional training

Accommodations Pt. 2

- Tools and Assistive Devices
 - Adjustable furniture
 - Decrease physical stress
 - Low tech devices
 - Magnifier, calendar/organizer, daily task list, etc.
 - High tech devices
 - Voice recognition devices, speech to text, etc.
- Mobility Aids
 - Scooter,
 - Stair Assist
 - Grab bars, etc.

Role of VRC

- Advising
 - On MS and employment issues
 - Accommodations
 - ADA
- Planning
 - Alternative positions,
 - Additional training
- Consultation/Advocacy
 - Educating employer
 - Negotiating alternative positions
- Evaluation
 - Vocational assessment
 - Job descriptions
- Placement
 - Outside employment or Work at Home

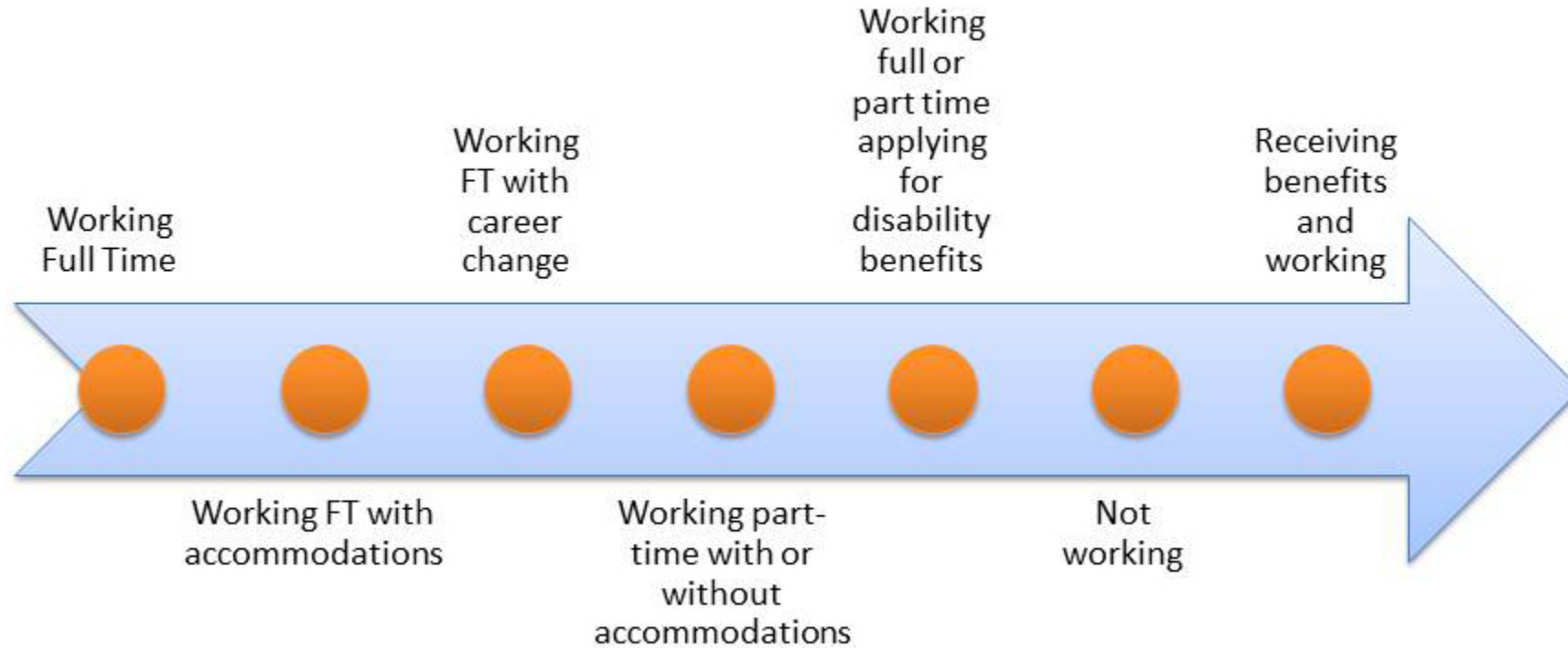
New/Different Employment

- Similar job, new employer
 - New employer may offer accommodations
 - PwMS decides when to seek employment
 - PwMS decides what to disclose at interview
- Career change
 - Vocational evaluation
 - Consider residual, transferrable skills
- Self-employment
 - Entrepreneurship
- Work from Home

Work from Home

- Explore re-employment with previous employer
 - Trainer, recruiter, customer Service
- Test self for requisite skills
 - Work at Home Assessment (Organizational and computer skills)
- Carefully consider options
 - SSI/SSDI – Work-at-home jobs
 - Call Center Jobs (Rat Race Rebellion, Alpine Access, Convergys, West at Home)
 - Virtual Assistants (Internet Virtual Assistants Association, Internet Girl Friday)
 - Non-phone jobs (Fexjobs, Google Jobs, Working Solutions, Click N Work)
 - Internet Researchers/Evaluators (Butler Hill, Leapforce, Lionbridge)
 - Others: (VIPKID, TTEC, Intuit, Dell, UnitedHealth Group, Aetna, BroadPath Health, Kaplan)

Employment of PwMS



Resources

- National Multiple Sclerosis Society
- Job Accommodations Network (JAN)
- The Multiple Sclerosis Association Of America: MSAA
- LiveWiseMS
- Multiple Sclerosis Foundation
- Multiple Sclerosis International
- Myelin Repair Foundation
- Multiple Sclerosis Trust

Questions

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