

Vocational Rehabilitation MONTHLY



March 3, 2006 v. 1.

Important Job Development Resources that Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Job Developers Should Share With All Injured Workers.

Counselors and Job Developers face new and exciting challenges with every new client. Each brings with them a unique set of work experience, education, and job knowledge. Assessing these abilities is not only a vital component of vocational rehabilitation, but can help improve an individual's employment outlook substantially. Although uncommon, one constant within the majority of industries is the increased demand for employees to have obtained a level of computer literacy. Some of the most difficult vocational rehabilitation cases involve unskilled trades workers who are unable to return to their previous occupation and have had limited exposure to computers and/or software applications. Introducing computer operations and applications can be overwhelming and confusing for many of these workers which presents a significant challenge for rehabilitation counselors.

There are creative ways in which computers can be introduced to clients who are reluctant or reserved about technology. Many of the Regional Michigan Works Service Centers offer introductory computer courses free of charge. These week-long courses introduce the worker to basic computer operations and provide them with examples of how business software is applied in today's workplace. Additionally, clients with basic computer experience who have access to personal computers at home, resource centers, or local libraries can utilize free computer training courses made available by GCF Global Learning© at www.gcflearnfree.org. This particular program was developed by education professionals dedicated to improving lifelong learning and computer literacy, and is endorsed by the International Association of Continuing Education and Training. Once clients have established a basic understanding of computer operation, counselors can assist them in exploring and registering for additional computer training courses available at local community colleges and Michigan Works locations. Here clients will begin learning popular business software, such as Microsoft® Word, Excel, and Access. Those clients who express continued interest and aptitude in computers should be encouraged to begin introductory keyboarding and business software courses. These courses offer more specialized training, ultimately improving the workers ability to locate and obtain employment. All in all, any additional computer exposure for clients will improve their prospective em-

ployment, especially in cases where a client's work restrictions demand sedentary work.

Exploring Return to Work Disincentives: A Wage Replacement Insurance Dilemma

When would an injured worker temporarily benefit more from not looking for work? Unfortunately this can happen under many auto no-fault policies in Michigan where persons who are injured as a result of an automobile accident can receive up to three years of wage replacement benefits when unable to return to their previous job. This is a situation that will surface from time to time within our industry and can be extremely difficult to resolve.

For example, a high wage earner with good medical benefits who was involved in an auto accident would many times retain their employment status under common labor agreements while they are receiving medical treatment. Although inactive in employment, they are reserved the right to return to their job once they are deemed medically able. The determination is typically made by the employee's treating physician in accordance with company physical job requirements. The nature and extent of the injury will have a significant effect on when and under what conditions the employee will return to work.

A problematic situation arises when the employee has reached a level of physical improvement where he or she is now able to return to work with some form of restriction. Although it is the responsibility of the worker is to mitigate their damages in compliance with current auto no-fault policy, this rarely is the case. In cases where the worker is still within the three year wage replacement window, and is able to work, no-fault insurers have the right to offer vocational rehabilitation services. The main question becomes whether or not the worker will "realistically" return to his or her previous occupation. If return-to-work optimism exists, and workplace seniority provisions, medical benefits, and retirement plan remain obtainable, a disincentive for the injured worker to look for work will develop. This is reinforced tenfold where the primary employer as established no moonlighting clauses in their labor contracts.