Employment After Burn Injury

A resource for individuals with burn injury and their supporters

This presentation is based on Burn Model Systems research and was developed with support from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR).

Visit www.MSKTC.org for additional Burn Injury resources.
Purpose of this Resource

- This presentation summarizes research on returning to work after burn injury.
- Information can help people living with a burn injury understand why returning to work can be an important phase of recovery that helps one return to a routine.
Returning to work is often accompanied by a confusing range of emotions, such as excitement and anxiety.

- You may not feel you are physically ready to return to work and do not have the stamina to work the same hours or perform the same tasks that you did before you were injured.

- If you were injured on the job, then returning to the same place of injury may lead to fear or anxiety related to the injury.
How can you make returning to work easier?
Things You Can Do to Make Returning to Work Easier

- Talk with your healthcare provider to evaluate your current work restrictions and communicate them to your employer
- Prepare emotionally and physically during recovery
- Seek counseling to help cope with psychological and emotional issues
- Talk to your employer about other work opportunities
- Stay in touch with your employer and express your interest in returning to work.
- Provide your employer with a timeframe for returning to work and a list of supports
- See your healthcare provider regularly
Workplace changes to help you return to work

- Your medical team may ask your employer for a job description to help determine if you are physically capable of meeting the demands of your job, or if you need changes made at your workplace to accommodate your disability.

- Whether you were burned on the job or not, employers are legally obligated under the Americans with Disabilities Act and many state laws, to provide you with reasonable accommodations.
What are some typical workplace accommodations?
Some typical workplace accommodations include:

- A modified work schedule (limited hours with a gradual increase to full time).
- Working in a clean and dry environment.
- Limits on how much you can lift.
- Limited or no exposure to extreme temperatures.
- Adaptive equipment to help you perform your job tasks.
- Altering work schedules to accommodate outpatient physical therapy and other medical appointments.
- Special software and hardware so a person with limited or no hand function can work on a computer.
- Scheduling your return-to-work date in the middle of the week. This short week will be less physically demanding for you.
If you were injured at work, you are likely covered by your state’s worker’s compensation insurance which varies from state to state.

Your case manager is responsible for helping to secure benefits connected to an on-the-job injury. He or she can also help you get treatment and make the transition back to work go more smoothly.

Your case manager may not provide you with all the information about what worker’s compensation benefits you are entitled to so its important to advocate for yourself.
What can you do to make the process for worker’s compensation easier?
Here are some things you can do to make this process run smoothly:

- Keep all paperwork.
- Know your claim number and stay in touch with your case manager.
- Always keep medical appointments.
- Remind your health care provider to submit the required worker’s compensation paperwork.
- Do not ignore calls, mail or other forms of communication from your worker’s compensation program.
- Make sure your case manager knows the name and address of your health care provider.
- Maintain good communication between yourself, your health care provider, and your claims manager.
- Have the Independent Medical Evaluation (IME) if needed.
Vocational Rehabilitation

- Vocational rehabilitation (VR) usually starts the first day you are admitted to the inpatient rehabilitation setting and continues after discharge, as the rehabilitation team and counselor continue to follow your employment status and provide help as needed.

- Vocational rehabilitation can also take place at any time an individual with a disability needs help finding employment.
VR counselor support may include:

- Helping you develop a plan that includes specific employment-related goals and how to achieve them.

- Helping you determine whether a potential job would be a good match for you by conducting a job analysis to determine:
  - Specific tasks of a particular job
  - Cognitive (mental or thinking), social and physical expectations
  - Need for accommodations.

- Setting up a “trial” work situation with a potential employer to determine if you can do the job, if you like the job, and accommodations you might need.

- Assessing your skills, limitations, health needs, work and education histories, interests and even personality style.
How can you find a VR counselor?
Finding a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

- Ask your health care provider or burn center for a referral to a VR counselor.

- The State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (DVR) can be found in almost every state and may be able to help you train for a new career if you are unable to return to the job you had before your injury.

- VR services vary by state. State DVRs may enter what is called an “order of selection” during difficult budget times, which means that people with more severe disabilities will be given priority to receive services.
A person is eligible to receive disability payments from the Social Security Administration (SSA) if he or she is unable to perform any kind of work at a level of “substantial and gainful” activity and the disability is expected to last at least a year.

The SSA pays disability benefits under two programs:

- **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)**, a long-term disability insurance program funded by payroll taxes. Eligibility is based on past work history and income. After a waiting period, SSDI recipients are eligible for Medicare.

- **Supplementary Security Income (SSI)**, a federal welfare program for people with disabilities who are unable to work and are of low economic status. SSI recipients are eligible for Medicaid after one month.
What will happen to your long term disability benefits if you return to work?

Federal work incentive programs under SSDI or SSI allow people with disabilities to receive benefits and federal health care (Medicare and/or Medicaid) while keeping some earnings from employment.
Federal Work Incentive Programs

Two federal work incentive programs that help people with disabilities secure a variety of supports such as job coaches, transportation, equipment, and work-site accommodations, include:

- **PASS (Plan to Achieve Self Support)**, which allows funds used in achieving employment goals such as paying tuition for training courses to be excluded in calculating your monthly SSI benefits.

- **IRWE (Impairment-Related Work Expenses)**, which can be claimed for your entire working life. In this program, work related expenses such as adaptive equipment or personal care costs can be deducted from your income so you can retain more of your SSI benefits.
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

- ADA prohibits employers from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities who are able to perform the essential functions of the job with or without accommodations.

- If you feel an employer has discriminated against you, contact the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).
How to get more information or find help:

More information can be provided by:

- Consulting with a physician, talking with a burn center staff member,
- Talking with your employer and,
- Researching other resources to help take the steps necessary to return to work safely and successfully.
For additional resources on living with a burn injury, please visit the Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center website at www.msktc.org.
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