



Rehabilitation Planning

With insurance, a call for Vocational Rehabilitation is very often the result of injury or illness that has intervened in a claimant's work capacity. Restoring their function by medical care is not usually enough to encourage them to return to work.

"Rehabilitation is an important component of the overall package of support that enables disabled people to overcome barriers to work"¹

"...studies show that modified work programmes for people with temporary or permanent disabling injuries can cut the number of work days lost by half and workers offered such programmes are twice as likely to return to work."²

Motivation and Confidence

Recent research³ confirms that people who want to work are more likely to get work. Confidence and motivation matter. The claim process and many other factors can sap claimants' morale. Pain and depression are frequent issues. Lack of confidence in the financial future and the outcome of treatment, lack of co-operation between therapists or with an employer can all be discouraging. Vocational Rehabilitation assessments provide opportunity to research work, income and benefit options, to co-ordinate between agencies including employers, and to formulate realistic achievable goals. A candid trusting relationship with the claimant is important to finding the cause of de-motivation.

Claimants suffering from depression are usually low in self-esteem and confidence; they may over use medicine, alcohol and nicotine. Their sleep is usually disturbed, and their memory and thinking are affected badly. They find it difficult to face up to problems. Appropriate counselling in liaison with treating professionals and support from family can help. Courses can be useful, be they for assertiveness or specific job training. Plans should focus on the claimant's existing skills, and be composed of small achievable tasks

Assets and Barriers

The Rehabilitation Assessment will identify the talents and skills that will help the claimant back to work, and will uncover all the reasons why they are not in work.

Electricians and Gas Central Heating plumbers have to work to very high safety standards. Even when they are injured and unable to match the physical demands of the job, their attitude and expertise in working procedures is valuable to any employer who needs accurate work.

There are often real 'functional' reasons why claimants may not be able to do former work, and the alternatives bring up problems that have to be overcome.

Lack of skill for a new job is common, but in the UK it is usually possible to find training within reasonable distance. Claimants often have little experience of interviews and may lack job seeking skills. Age can be a factor, as with the injured agricultural tractor driver of 58 who wanted to settle his claim and retire rather than go back to very low-paid work.

Finding suitable vacancies can be an issue, and a good plan will link to the recruitment methods of the job and industry in question. Vocational Rehabilitation involves knowledge of different jobs, how the relevant sector of the job market operates, and the pay and conditions⁴. Few claimants are expert job-seekers, and knowing the local support agencies is important, as there are sometimes good opportunities for help with jobseeking.

A claimant on Incapacity Benefit was deemed fit enough to transfer to Jobseekers Allowance although his mobility was still affected after a crush injury to his left leg. This affected his income and he could not afford to repair his car. Living in a semi-rural area, he needed the car to get to College to study for a new job, or to an employer who could offer him light bench work. The Insurer paid for repairs (about £250) so that he could get started on training and work.

It is not unusual for domestic issues to be important. An injured claimant may assume the housekeeping and child tending role. Transport can be an issue when the family has one car and the spouse uses it to go to work, or when mobility means that public transport is impractical – a surprisingly common event in hilly areas. Legal and financial issues with an employer must be resolved.

A former van driver was retired on medical grounds after a long spell away from his public-sector employer following a car accident. Although he was getting well enough to return to driving, and liked the work, his medical pension rights could have been jeopardised by a return to paid employment, and he needed help to understand and negotiate the best solution for him and his previous employer.

Vocational Plans

As we have seen, a Plan⁵ is always based on an assessment of the claimant's overall situation. The assessment will describe the conditions and barriers to work, and will respond to the specific type of insurance or employment.

The assessment will say what work is suitable for the claimant. A return-to-previous-work plan is likely to focus on adjustments and graduated to duties, but a new career plan will focus on transferable skills and preparation.

The situation can be complicated, and several actions may need to be co-ordinated. Well planned rehabilitation draws on a very wide range of approaches.

Some examples of rehabilitation activities include:

- Job analysis and job modification
- Graduated return to work
- Aids & equipment
- Transferable Skills Analysis
- Psychometric testing
- Consultation with employer and workplace adjustments
- Re-training and developing study skills
- Job seeking, Careers guidance
- Working with DEA, Access to Work grants and job placement agencies
- Co-ordinating voluntary work, work trials, work experience placements
- Coaching and mentoring
- Co-ordination with GP and treating therapists
- Ergonomic or Functional Capacity Assessments
- Condition Management education for stress, back care etc
- Cognitive Assessments
- Functional restoration plans & Pain Management programs

A Vocational Plan will identify the goal and the steps required for it to be achieved. It will set out relevant actions, organisations and people, so that they can understand what is expected of them, and so that their contributions can be evaluated.

Time frames for action are part of the plan, and help prevent things drifting.

Plans will also contain suitable measures of progress, which can be monitored, so that and everyone – claimant, insurer, therapists, and case manager - can work together. The case manager is responsible for reporting progress, and maintaining a good and understanding relationship with the claimant so that the plan can be adjusted quickly if needs be.

A claimant with difficulty walking after an injury needs physiotherapy to regain stability and stamina. The plan recommends sessions with a physiotherapist and attendance at a local gym. It also recommends a target: to be able to walk to the bus stop, into work, and back again in the evening.

Closing a case

Plans identify when to close a case.

Ideally this is when the claimant has achieved their goal and is in work.

Often, however, good progress allows the insurer and claimant to settle earlier, and the case may be closed at that point.

Sometimes the claimant's situation changes, so the goal is no longer appropriate, or the claimant requests closure, or fails to respond actively to the program. Having a clear plan makes the decision to close simpler and clearer for all concerned. Good plans have contingency arrangements, so that effort is not wasted when circumstances dictate a change.

A former manufacturing engineer technician with a good apprenticeship background (assets), wanted to set up in business making and selling specialist spares for the motor industry (goal). Lacking experience in business (barrier) or capital (barrier) he needed to learn and look for partners (objectives). The plan was to send him on basic computer skills and self-employment courses (actions) to learn the skills and to acquire professional guidance and support. He also was to study the local metal engineering supply sector to identify competitors and interim job opportunities to help him earn his keep while setting up his business. The fallback option was for him to be employed again in light engineering.



RNL and Vocational Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation Network Limited (RNL) is dedicated to providing the optimum tailored return-to-work assessments and plans for each claimant. Respecting claimants' conditions and needs and responding realistically to work opportunities, RNL offers employers and insurers confidence in its plans and good use of local and national services to support a return to work.

RNL's consultant skills, ongoing supervision and training, rehabilitation reporting and management practices, have been brought together to offer the highest national and international standards of Vocational Rehabilitation.

References

¹ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit report 'Improving the life chances of disabled people' January 2005

² Cited by HSE, Job Retention and Vocational Rehabilitation: The Development and Evaluation of a Conceptual Framework, 2003

³ DWP, unpublished, 2005

⁴ e.g. NOMIS, Worktrain, O*NET, Odyssey

⁵ see also Better Regulation Taskforce, 'Better Routes to Redress', May 2004