

INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

Over the past decade rehabilitation professionals have encountered a growing number of challenges. These challenges are facilitated by changes that occur within society as a whole and are the result of evolving attitudes and beliefs about the rehabilitation process by people with disabilities and their families. Given this context the notion of a time-limited graduate program designed to prepare rehabilitation professionals to serve an increasingly expanding group of individuals while attending to issues of multiculturalism, independent living, and supported living seems outdated and ineffectual. Evidence of new ways of thinking about professional preparation of rehabilitation professionals is emerging and is characterized by a life-long approach to learning and recognition that education and social services organizations must support their staffs in acquiring new knowledge and skills in order to facilitate ongoing improvement of services.

It is also evident that the issues confronted by rehabilitation professionals have become increasingly complex and require the involvement of colleagues from a variety of disciplines as well as the insight and guidance of individuals with disabilities and their families. The image of one professional facilitating the rehabilitation process has disappeared. Instead, an individual with a disability and his or her family, as well as a team of interdisciplinary professionals, work together to assist the individual to achieve his or her vocational and personal goals. Evidence of this change can be seen in several powerful, consumer-driven movements, such as independent living and supported employment, as well as in planning and delivery of services and supports. Given these changes one might rightfully ask about the role and the preparation of the contemporary rehabilitation professional. The articles contained in this special topic issue of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* focus on these concerns.

Mary Jane Owen challenges our thinking about the meaning of disability and the specialization and segregation often associated with services. She suggests that people with disabilities and those who provide services need to move beyond a ghetto mentality and approach to services and join instead with the larger population in the

development of "mainstream community-based planning and service delivery" that fosters interdependence and a sense of belonging. As such, she suggests that consumers and rehabilitation professionals must work together to promote a society that values and embraces diversity.

Martha Lentz Walker reminds us about the importance of a philosophical base in guiding practice. In this regard, she suggests that there are multiple ways of knowing, each determined by one's unique experience and perspective. The differing perspectives reflected by consumers and vocational rehabilitation professionals may be considered strengths, and if approached thoughtfully, and mutually valued, can lead to an ever-growing and -changing approach to practice.

The need to value changing realities, discussed in the first two articles in this issue, is reflected in the articles that follow. Hasazi, Collins, and Salembier describe a system of professional development that is transdisciplinary in approach, designed to address the professional and personal goals of the adult learner. Their approach is based on the notion that organizations and institutions must become learning systems in order to continue to transform and improve their services. As such, professionals within the systems must be encouraged to acquire new knowledge and challenge existing policies and practices.

Patterson, in focusing on graduate preparation of rehabilitation counselors, suggests that changes in the field over the past decade require that counselors have a solid basis in the foundational areas of rehabilitation counseling, acquire critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and become adept at using instructional technology for skills development. Mank and his colleagues describe a framework for establishing and maintaining a technical assistance network based on knowledge gained from their national technical assistance project directed at supported employment. They propose a number of features that appear to be essential in establishing a technical assistance capacity that is truly responsive to the agencies and personnel requesting the assistance.

Finally, an article by Schaller and Szymanski and an article by Hanley-Maxwell and Millington address issues of current concern among rehabili-

tation professionals involved with supported employment. Schaller and Szymanski discuss the meaning of consumer choice and suggest approaches for operationalizing the concept. In addition, they offer a set of guidelines for evaluating the success of individual placements, which include the gathering of satisfaction data from the perspective of the client, employer, and family as well as outcome measures associated with participation and independence. Hanley-Maxwell and Millington discuss ways of enhancing independence in supported employment. Given the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), it is likely that employment opportunities will expand and, as such, individuals with disabilities will have greater choices regarding work settings. In order to make choices and maximize independence, Hanley-Maxwell and Millington suggest a number of strategies, including increased use of naturally occurring supports in the workplace.

Our awareness of this decade as a period of significant change has been heightened by editing this special issue of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*. Those who prepare rehabilitation professionals are newly aware that transdisciplinary approaches to professional education are essential and that collaboration is central to service delivery, technical assistance, and relevant personnel preparation. Given this collaborative approach educators, rehabilitation professionals, and consumers must transcend accustomed roles and acknowledge their interdependence. The model programs and practices contained in this issue point the way to change. The thoughtful discussions provided by each of the contributors help us make sense of our triumphs and failures. The growing pains we are experiencing as a profession and society herald a world in which we will all celebrate human diversity. We can get there from here.

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