

INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

One of the most important issues that will face the field of vocational rehabilitation during the next few years relates to cultural and ethnic populations. The present delivery of vocational rehabilitation services is a highly successful model that has resulted in positive changes in the lives of many people with disabilities. Nell Carney, Rehabilitation Services Administration Commissioner, attributes at least part of her success to having been a client of vocational rehabilitation. But the system has been less able to reach minority populations. It appears that this failing is not the result of a lack of effort or emphasis. Conversations with those in leadership and administrative positions within vocational rehabilitation suggest an acute awareness of the need for programming to reach these populations. Yet both anecdotal and empirical evidence indicate that a good percentage of African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Americans of Asian descent are not being served by the vocational rehabilitation system.

This issue of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* attempts to highlight the particular and unique needs of these cultural and ethnic minorities in America as they relate to vocational rehabilitation of people with disabilities. It is not intended to be a definitive issue or even a statement of the current status of vocational rehabilitation and these various groups. The objective is to increase our awareness that ethnic and cultural minority populations are growing and have dispersed geographically to all areas of the United States. Knowledge of and sensitivity to minorities is necessary, not only for those professionals working in large urban areas.

People with disabilities who are members of an ethnic or cultural group will be found in just about any community. Rehabilitation professionals and programs such as vocational rehabilitation may have to reexamine their model and process to ensure the inclusion of the many different populations.

The first article in this issue of the journal provides a general overview of the changing demography in the United States related specifically to vocational rehabilitation. It suggests that change may be necessary within the entire vocational rehabilitation system not only to respond to clients or consumers, but as institutional entities. The article by Marshall, Johnson, and Lonetree highlights American Indians and gives specific examples of successful outreach. Wright offers recommendations for change that will affect African Americans, and Leal focuses on people of Hispanic origin and vocational rehabilitation. Quiroga and Shafer offer a unique perspective on the interactive effects of culture and disability. Watson and Collins explore ways in which cultural sensitivity can be incorporated in the training of rehabilitation professionals. Finally, Walker, Orange, and Rackley address the major concerns of preparation of minority personnel in the fields of rehabilitation.

The development of this issue has been an eye opener and a learning experience for me, as I hope it will be for you. The articles answer few questions but raise the need for all of us in rehabilitation to be open to the changes around us so that we do not ignore those we have been charged to serve.

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