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From the Editor

The topic of this issue is Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), an area which has not received the amount of attention that is deserved, given the incredible financial and psychological impact of this disability. As I have had the opportunity to travel around the United States, as well as a number of countries throughout Europe, it is very clear to me that the long term impact of traumatic brain injury is a very serious matter that is not completely understood nor fully appreciated by many in the rehabilitation community. I am so pleased that we have two guest editors that are experts in the direct service and program planning aspects of traumatic brain injury rehabilitation.

It is becoming increasingly clear to knowledgeable people in the traumatic brain injury field that this is a long term disability, and while great progress has been made and positive strides achieved towards the community reintegration and work reentry of these patients, there is still an enormous amount of work that is required.

As a result of advances in emergency evacuation procedures, neurosurgical and rehabilitation techniques and improved drugs, there are more and more individuals surviving motor vehicle crashes and other accidents. Annually close to 1/2 million persons in the United States alone sustain a brain injury of sufficient degree to require treatment, with approximately 50 000 sustaining injury resulting in severe chronic debilitating impairments. Because a significant proportion of traumatic brain injury survivors are young adults who are just beginning their careers, brain

injury frequently results in long term economic hardship on victims, their families, and society. At every level the costs of traumatic brain injury are staggering, perhaps as high as 6 billion dollars for direct cost such as acute medical care and rehabilitation and 22 billion dollars for indirect costs such as lost productivity and wages, ongoing incumbent health maintenance, and long term care.

Many of the costs of traumatic brain injury can be linked to disappointing rates of post-injury employment. Estimates of persons who will enter or reenter the competitive workforce have been very low, often below 30%. In this special issue on traumatic brain injury, there are several papers which specifically address issues such as compensatory strategies, memory training, and how different approaches to job accommodation can be useful. There are also a number of papers which approach issues related to assessment and the importance of computer and technology resources.

It is increasingly clear that we have the ability to help people with severe traumatic brain injury greatly improve their lives far more than would have been possible 10-15 years ago. On the other hand, the investment into effective long term rehabilitation is a substantial one and communities must be prepared to spend a large amount of money initially in order to get a long term cost effective outcome. There are few disabilities that have the suddenness of life change that traumatic brain injury leads to; more often than not, the effect is catastrophic in terms of how a family and

person will deal with what the future holds for them. As well meaning as acute care health providers are, it is those professionals in the community, as well as family members who must deal with the long term day to day issues. In this particular issue of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, we provide for the first time since the journal has been published an in-depth look at traumatic brain injury and hope that it will be useful for professionals and family members who are on the front line on a daily basis.

As will be seen in this issue, there are many conflicts and challenges in the vocational rehabilitation of persons with traumatic brain injury. In this issue the co-editors have assembled writers

who are able to present contemporary practices of managing these challenges. While persons with severe traumatic brain injury have traditionally experienced limited access to vocational rehabilitative services in normal work places, new service technology such as supported employment and assistive technology show promise for reversing these trends. The key to successful community reentry and work for persons with traumatic brain injury are individualized services and supports and providing knowledge of legally mandated rights and the means for exercising them.

Paul Wehman