

INTRODUCTION

Recent international economic downturns have caused many people to reflect on the value of work. The financial benefits of work allow people to support themselves and often their families. Many employees are provided health care benefits, occasionally comprehensive medical and dental benefits. Work also has important social value. For adults, personal identity is often based on work accomplishments, responsibilities, and status. Many employees develop and maintain friendships in their workplace where recreational and social events are planned. Work also provides activities which fill daily lives, often five or more days each week.

Given the important role of work in many people's lives, we have organized this issue of *NeuroRehabilitation* around the theme of *vocational rehabilitation*. Neurological injury or illness is often a perplexing and overwhelming experience for survivors. Long-term unemployment postinjury is common and perhaps one of the most devastating aspects of disability.

We have made substantial progress in vocation rehabilitation techniques during the past decade. Most promising are techniques which focus on building natural supports, supported employment, and co-worker support models. Unfortunately, there are still many challenges facing persons who wish to return to work. Lack of funding

or lack of locally available vocational rehabilitation programs are often reported. Furthermore, employees and co-workers often add to employment barriers. Negative attitudes and stereotypes about persons with disabilities often limits the amount of support in the workplace.

A variety of relevant manuscripts are presented in this issue of *NeuroRehabilitation* and we hope the information provided will enhance return to work efforts. Kregel and colleagues discuss behavioral problems and their influence on employment retention. Job placement and generalization issues are discussed by Schuster, Parenté, and colleagues. Hagglund and Frank provide information about return to work following spinal cord injury. Arokiasamy discusses philosophical and ethical issues in return to work. From a research perspective, Serio and Devens comment on the implications of family members' perceptions of return to work obstacles.

We have made significant progress in the development of acute care medical techniques to increase survival rates. Improving the employment rate following the onset of neurological disability remains as a major obstacle to improving quality of life.

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