Work 36 (2010) 371–372
DOI 10.3233/WOR-2010-1038
IOS Press

Guest Editorial

Executive Function in the Workplace

It is a pleasure to serve as the guest editor of this special issue of *WORK: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment and Rehabilitation* that focuses on the impact of executive function on work participation. It is my hope that readers will be introduced to the role executive function plays in an individual's ability to participate in work, the populations of people executive function deficits effect, and gain an understanding of the work that needs to be done to improve the work outcomes of our clients. This issue is dedicated to the countless people with executive function deficits who have gone undetected and been told they were fine to go on with their lives when it was apparent to them that something was wrong. The articles in this special issue will provide a snapshot of the issues that these individuals face and hopefully be the impetus to develop the assessments and interventions necessary to meet their needs.

The first four articles are a series of case studies that will highlight executive dysfunction in populations served by rehabilitation professionals: (1) Pat Precin describes the use of visual imagery as a tool to improve an individual's ability to sequence work tasks with an individual who has executive dysfunction resulting from Asperger's Syndrome; (2) Tamara Ownsworth describes a metacognitive contextual approach to help facilitate return to work with individuals with acquired brain injury; (3) Suzanne Bade will describe the effect of executive function on work performance with an individual with a brain aneurysm; and (4) Kimberly Hartmann will discuss the use of assistive technology to compensate for executive dysfunction effecting work performance in an individual with a mild traumatic brain injury (MTBI). All of these case studies focus on the effect of executive function on work and provide an overview of how executive function deficits must be addressed in work rehabilitation programs.

The next series of articles will describe studies that focus on the assessment of executive function. The Cognitive Rehabilitation Research Group (CRRG) at Washington University presents a feasibility study of adapting the Executive Function Performance Test to use in the acute stage of stroke to detect executive function deficits prior to discharge from the hospital. This study highlights the number of people who are missed and often discharged with a clean bill of health because their deficits are not apparent on measures of self-care. Next, Leonard Matheson reports findings from comparing measures of executive function and IQ with individuals with traumatic brain injury. IQ is often times a confounder in measuring executive dysfunction and this empirical study evaluates this relationship. Next, O'Neill and I evaluate an outcomes assessment battery that can be used to measure the effectiveness of work rehabilitation with individuals with executive dysfunction. Current outcome measures in work rehabilitation focus on motor impairment and are often not a good indicator of readiness to return to work for individuals with complex deficits. This study presents a new methodology that can be used to measure outcomes for individuals with complex deficits – in particular cognitive deficits. Finally, Hofgren and colleagues present their findings from a longitudinal study they completed with individuals with acquired brain injury. They evaluated the effect of numerous impairments at the acute stage of injury on work performance one year post-injury.

Finally, the last two articles of this special issue highlight areas for future research in the area of executive dysfunction and work. O'Brien and I discuss the results of our study that evaluated the work outcomes of individuals with mild stroke who were discharged with limited or no services following stroke. We found that a large number of people with no physical or self-care impairments following stroke who were not able to return to work or maintain employment. The study suggests that executive dysfunction may be the limited factor in their ability to work. Finally, Matthew Dodson

describes a theoretical model that can be used to address the many factors effecting return to work following mild traumatic brain injury-in particular executive dysfunction.

The authors who contributed their work hope that this issue will inspire more people to work in this area. Work practice has traditionally focused on musculoskeletal impairment. It is becoming apparent that cognitive impairments need attention. We hope that this issue of the journal can signal a shift in practice to show that occupational therapy will, should, and can help individuals participate in work irregardless of injury, illness, or impairments.

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