

For Your Insight: Research and Practice From the Field

March 4, 2020

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This biweekly update highlights relevant research for RETAIN states and summarizes key takeaways that may benefit program implementation. Each summary includes a link to an article, resource, or formal abstract.

Best Practices in Employee Retention and Return-to-Work: An In-Depth Look Inside an Exemplary American Corporation

This report from the Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People With Disabilities (LEAD) Center describes best practices and strategies—as identified by the Center—that employers can take to help support their employees stay at work and return to work (RTW) after injury or illness. The LEAD Center “...sought to identify and document effective policies, practices, and strategies working at both the individual and system level with the focus on the corporation’s ability to retain people with disabilities in their workforce.” The report describes one exemplar corporation’s policies and practices that can be replicated with the goal of supporting and retaining employees by enabling employees to RTW safely and quickly. The report also describes the ways that “the corporation has created a workplace culture, policies, practices, and an integrated benefits plan that embodies its commitment to attract and retain a diverse workforce that includes people with disabilities and mature workers.” The report concludes that “in the corporation, employees want to return to work not only because they are paid well and have good benefits, but because they trust management and know that they are working for a company that invests in and values their workforce. This culture is consistent from the CEO level through all levels of management.”

Full report available: [Wleklinski, B., Salon, R., & Taylor, B. \(2014\). *Best practices in employee retention and return-to-work: An in-depth look inside an exemplary American corporation*. Washington, DC: National Disability Institute, LEAD Center.](#)

Tags: Best practices, employee retention, RTW

Rehabilitation Counseling in Rural Settings: A Phenomenological Study on Barriers and Supports

Landon, Connor, McKnight-Lizotte, and Pena (2019) interviewed 10 vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors who had experience working in the VR system in rural settings. The goal of these interviews was to explore the “...barriers and supports to providing VR services in rural areas,” by answering the research question: “How do rehabilitation professionals describe their experiences working with individuals with disabilities in rural communities?” Rural settings refer to communities with fewer than 50,000 residents. Three themes emerged from the interviews: (1) “barriers to employment,” (2) “supports enhancing employment outcomes,” and (3) “effective strategies in rural rehabilitation.” Barriers to employment cited in this report included lack of VR agency resources that could help people with disabilities seek employment (e.g., job development, job coaching); fear of losing federal disability benefits after finding employment; fear and mistrust of outsiders (e.g., job developers, rehabilitation counselors, other service providers) who did not live within the community; the labor market; lack of transportation; stigma; and a lack of visibility of VR resources. Supports that enhanced employment outcomes included a strong sense of community; family expectations and support; employer support; and community partners (e.g., the state Department of Labor). Finally, effective strategies in rural rehabilitation included location fit; time in the community; use of technology; collaboration; and networking among professionals. The authors concluded that “both interagency collaboration and community networking are essential functions in not only the rural job development process, but also in brokering rural relationships.”

Full text available: [Landon, T., Connor, A., McKnight-Lizotte, M., & Pena, J. \(2019\). Rehabilitation counseling in rural settings: A phenomenological study on barriers and supports. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 85\(2\), 47–57.](#)

Tags: Rural settings, RTW strategies, collaboration

Hospital Nurses Working Wounded: Motivations and Obstacles to Return to Work as Experienced by Nurses With Injuries

Mullen, Gillen, Kools, and Blanc (2015) interviewed 16 hospital nurses who previously returned to work after work-related musculoskeletal injuries. The goal of the interviews was to learn about the nurses’ work-injury experiences and to identify the “...motivations and obstacles to return to work and continued work following injury to hospital nurses.” Nurses interviewed shared their perspectives on the barriers and facilitators of RTW for nurses in a hospital setting. The authors analyzed and organized the responses into the following categories: “injury as an expected consequence of hospital work; nursing alone versus nursing together; the impact of injury on professional, family, and social roles; and nurses’ understanding of and involvement with the workers’ compensation system.” The authors concluded that findings from these interviews can be used by hospital and health managers to “...help promote more effective return to work programs within the hospital setting.”

Full text available: [Mullen, K., Gillen, M., Kools, S., & Blanc, P. \(2015\). Hospital nurses working wounded: Motivations and obstacles to return to work as experienced by nurses with injuries. *Work*, 50\(2\), 295–304.](#)

Tags: Work-related injury, RTW, nurses

Return to Work: A Foundational Approach to Return to Function

This paper explores the need for and benefit of “...adopting a societal approach to return to work and daily function...” and the responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in “...the restoration of health and function...” of workers with injuries. The authors defined stakeholders as workers, employers, caregivers, insurance companies, regulators and legislators, and attorneys. The paper explains the perceptions that others might hold relative to RTW and the realities of RTW for these stakeholders. For example, the authors described that workers are commonly perceived as disinterested in RTW, while the reality is that “...workers need to be actively involved in the progression of their return to work and proactively pursue early return to work.” The paper then notes that RTW and worker reintegration is not possible unless stakeholders are working toward the goal of “...restoration of health and function of the injured person” and described the roles and responsibilities that each stakeholder has in reaching that goal. Finally, the paper includes nine appendices, including tools that facilitate the development of RTW policies, state-specific RTW programs, and a state-by-state table of RTW statutes in the United States.

Full paper available: [International Association of Industrial Accident Boards and Commissions, Disability Management and Return to Work Committee. \(2016, April 19\). *Return to work: A foundational approach to return to function*. Madison, WI: Authors.](#)

Tags: Perceptions of RTW, employers, injured workers

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