

RETAINWORKS Highlights Behavioral Health Needs with New Tools for Health-Care Providers

Spring 2024 RETAIN Success Story

Like physical injury or illness, behavioral health conditions—such as depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders—can affect a person’s ability to work. The team at the Kansas Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network, known as RETAINWORKS, knew that health-care providers needed tools to better tailor accommodations to the needs of patients with behavioral health diagnoses. The team created two forms to fill that need: the *Behavioral Health 30-Day Risk Assessment* form and the *Behavioral Health Activity Prescription* form. The forms have benefited the program and RETAINWORKS participants.

Background

The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that more than one in five adults in the United States live with a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder. This includes anxiety, depression, substance use disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and eating disorders. These conditions can be serious enough to affect a person’s ability to stay at work or return to work (SAW/RTW). People with physical health conditions can also have behavioral health issues that make their recovery more difficult.

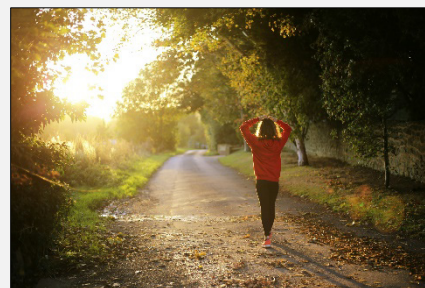
Challenge

Many tools that health-care providers use to create SAW/RTW plans and recommend workplace accommodations focus on physical limitations. They include recommendations like lifting restrictions or ergonomic workstations. However, the accommodations may not address the cognitive limitations that can come with a behavioral health diagnosis. Examples of cognitive limitations include difficulty making



Challenge-Action-Results

Challenge: Most tools that help health-care providers create SAW/RTW plans focus on accommodations for physical limitations. This makes it difficult to create a plan for people with behavioral health diagnoses.



Action: RETAINWORKS created a 30-day risk assessment form and an activity prescription form that focus on the needs of people with behavioral health diagnoses.

Results: RETAINWORKS has seen better communication with social workers and behavioral health-care providers, increased enrollment of people with behavioral health diagnoses, and improved services for participants.

decisions, processing written or spoken language, and coping with stress. In addition, the RETAINWORKS team noticed that behavioral health-care providers—such as social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists—were not fully engaged in the RETAIN program. Those providers did not always understand how to fit their work into a framework that focused so heavily on plans for physical health recovery and physical accommodations.

Actions

Carrie Mitzel of Stormont Vail Health and Kendall Runnebaum from Ascension Via Christi worked together to create the *Behavioral Health 30-Day Risk Assessment* and *Behavioral Health Activity Prescription* forms. They wanted to develop user-friendly tools that could be used statewide to help health-care providers create SAW/RTW plans that include limitations caused by behavioral health conditions. When developing the forms, Mitzel and Runnebaum considered the following actions:

- **Focus on Behavioral Health Needs.** The forms were designed to identify and address the unique needs of RETAIN participants with behavioral health diagnoses, improve communication between the RETAIN program and behavioral health-care providers, and increase the participation of a population that can be overlooked and underserved by health-care and workforce service providers.
- **Tailor Recommendations to the Needs of Participants.** The forms give behavioral health-care providers options for common work accommodations that can help people with behavioral health diagnoses be successful on the job. Examples of these accommodations include additional breaks throughout the workday; modified working conditions, like working from home or working fewer hours; and regular appointments for therapy or medication management.
- **Make the Tools Work for Providers.** The behavioral health risk assessment form complements the activity prescription form by allowing providers to track their patients' progress and adjust recommendations as needed.

RESULTS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Since implementing the forms in November 2023, the RETAINWORKS team has noted the following improvements:

- **Increased Percentage of New Enrollees with Behavioral Health Diagnoses.** RETAINWORKS began enrolling more people with behavioral health diagnoses because of the two forms, thanks in part to more behavioral health-care providers referring patients to the program. In October 2023, 3.8% of new enrollees had a primary behavioral health diagnosis. After the forms were implemented in November 2023, 13.8% of new enrollees had a primary behavioral health diagnosis, and 38% had a secondary behavioral health diagnosis.

- **Improved Communication and Collaboration with Behavioral Health-Care Providers.** For example, Stormont Vail Hospital had difficulty showing social workers how they fit into RETAIN. The RETAINWORKS team used the behavioral health forms to show these providers how their work fit into the SAW/RTW process. As a result, RETAINWORKS onboarded 23 new social workers.
- **Improved Services for Participants.** The forms give providers a wide range of options when recommending accommodations for a SAW/RTW plan. The accommodations in the behavioral health forms not only better fit the needs of people with behavioral health diagnoses, but they also fit people with some physical health diagnoses, such as chronic migraines, seizure disorders, and conditions that cause chronic fatigue.

RETAIN WORKS

Kansas is participating in RETAIN (Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network) to build connections and improve coordination among employers, health-care providers, and other key parties to help workers with new injuries and illness stay in the workforce. The Kansas Department of Commerce leads RETAINWORKS in coordination with several partners. The US Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, sponsors RETAIN.

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