



The Madonna Minute

A briefing about the programs and innovations at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital

AUGUST 2012

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Specialized work re-entry program helps patients resume their life roles

The overarching goal of rehabilitation is to help individuals who have sustained a disabling injury or illness to resume care for themselves and return to their life roles. For many individuals, this means resuming their careers or finding other forms of employment. Research shows that, on average, 35 percent of persons with spinal cord injury (SCI) returned to paid employment¹ and about 40 percent of persons with acquired brain injury (BI), including non-traumatic brain injury, such as stroke, returned to work after two years.^{2,4} Studies show that sustaining employment over time is difficult for these populations.³ Employment not only provides individuals with a means of financial support; it also serves as a source of satisfaction, self-worth and pride. It is for these reasons that Madonna has developed and implemented a structured work re-entry program across both inpatient and outpatient components of our system of care.

Madonna's work re-entry program begins with an assessment of the person's readiness to address return to work. The clinician gathers information regarding the person's previous employment history,



Roberta Brown files papers in the Patient Financial Services department at Madonna as Gail Finsand, occupational therapist, evaluates her progress. Roberta attends Madonna's work re-entry program as part of her stroke rehabilitation in preparation for resuming her clerical position.

details about their previous job, including the physical, cognitive and behavioral capacities required, environmental factors, and any barriers to returning to work. These barriers may be directly related to the specific job duties, or in related areas, such as accessing transportation, completing self care or managing finances. If appropriate, and with the person's permission, a copy of their job description is obtained and a job site assessment may be performed. If the person has not

already had a neuropsychological assessment, one will be obtained. The rehabilitation team reviews the assessment and develops and individualized return to work plan for the individual.

For individuals who still lack basic skills or stamina, the team will develop a therapy plan to build physical, cognitive or behavioral strengths. For others, who already have basic skills and are able to tolerate several hours of physical activity, the next step is work simulation where the therapist

provides a work task that is similar to the type of work they do, and then assess their physical, cognitive and behavioral ability to complete the tasks accurately and timely. Madonna occupational therapists (OTs) administer the test, which may include one of the following activities:

- Sorting mail
- Assembling a simple wheelbarrow
- Assembling a large PVC doll chair with multiple parts
- Operating a home retail sales business, filling orders, doing inventory, answering phones, etc.
- Simulated accounting or other activity specific to their job.

The work simulation task provides additional information regarding deficits, which are then incorporated into the individual's treatment plan, where appropriate. At some point in the person's program, they may be asked to be involved in a work trial, where the individual follows steps similar to those in a real work environment by volunteering at Madonna. The work trial may be for a couple hours a day, one day a week, or much longer depending upon the volunteer job, the person's ability, and other factors, and may last weeks, months or longer.

For many people, a brief time doing the volunteer experience gives them the stamina and self-confidence to return to work. For others, for whom employment is not feasible, continuing this volunteer work is a way to feel productive.

Madonna has a partnership with Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation

(VR), and may include their resources in the return to work program. A VR counselor may visit with the persons served and work collaboratively with Madonna clinicians regarding the person's return to work plan and goals.

For more information about Madonna's work re-entry program, please contact Virginia Schweitzer, program leader, at 402.413.3279 or vschweitzer@madonna.org

References

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