

Very Important Patient: Peer-to-Peer Sharing Call on Vocational Rehabilitation

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Does anyone want to share how they found out about vocational rehabilitation? This is Yvonne and I found out about it through my social worker at the clinic. She felt that I would be a good candidate for that. But in the very beginning, even though she thought I'd be a good candidate, I had to go to the Social Security office and I had to get an appointment and then I had to be interviewed. I was asked a lot of questions and from that point on they instructed me where I should go to voc rehab. But that's how mine got started.

Great. Thank you for sharing. Then if anybody else wants to answer they can and then we'll move on to the second question which is "How did you decide to pursue vocational rehabilitation?" Then if you want to answer just [cut off].

This is Jennifer. I'm a patient and I've been on dialysis for about three years. Almost three years – about two and a half. I heard about voc rehab through my food stamp – my DSS worker. She was my social worker through the local County DSS office and it was recommended and I looked into it and I've definitely benefited from it.

Great. Thank you. Does anybody else want to answer that question?

This is Steve. I heard about voc rehab through the transplant social worker and I went in and talked to them. They helped me with going back to school and learning new things – jobs and positions where I was off my feet. So they really helped me quite a bit.

Great. Thank you. Anybody else want to share how they found out? Okay, the next question we had was "Why did you decide to pursue vocational rehabilitation?"

This is Barbara. I decided I was ready to go back to work and it wasn't time for me to retire. So the job that I had was that I was a temp and once that job was over I started applying for jobs and I ended up working for the Department of Defense in Finance. That's what I did before I got laid off.

Great.

This is Steve. I decided to pursue the voc rehab because all the positions I had previously were on my feet, bartending and things like that, and my hips were going bad from the medication that I was on for my first transplant. So I had to find a position where I was off my feet and they [pause] so I got into the office field through them.

Awesome. Thank you.

This is Richard. When I made the decision myself that I should return to work, my social worker stepped in and introduced me to vocational rehab and the services made available for me. The company however, like I said previously, has been fantastic working with me and we were really concerned with what my medications were and things like that and the sent a human resource director from corporate office down to meet with me and we outlined what I did in the past and what I continued to do. And basically I stepped right back into my role and just kept them informed if it started getting too much for me and things like that. It would never and continues to not be an issue. We all know how we have good bad days. Again, it's been really great and the people who work with me are great. The vocational rehab part worked. My social worker was always aware of my condition and things like that as long as I let them know my surroundings and what was happening. It's been fantastic to return. I really thought it was going to be an issue and but it hasn't been so far.

Great. Thank you.

This is Jennifer again and I chose to pursue voc rehab because, due to complications from diabetes, the neuropathy was not allowing me to do the job I was always doing which was as a server. And I always wanted to go back to school and finish and change my major and I did. I was able to get my associates degree then the disease has progressed too much and now that I'm on dialysis I would like to pursue it again and maybe do it online.

Great. Thank you. Does anybody else want to share on why they decided to pursue vocational rehabilitation? Okay, I'll move on to the next question "How do you sign up or how do you get started?"

This is Yvonne. I got started, like I said earlier, through my social worker. She thought I would be a good candidate for that so that's what I did. I did what she asked me to do. She gave me the numbers to call and that's what I did. They set up an appointment. I went and did I guess what you would call an interview and then it took off from there.

Great. And that was the social worker at the hospital or at the dialysis center?

It was at the dialysis center U.S. Renal.

Ok. Awesome. Anybody else want to share any information on how patients might want to sign up or get started with vocational rehabilitation?

Even if you're new to dialysis, talk to your social worker at your clinic or if you have a social worker in your local county then you can go through them and they'll be able to point you in the right direction and give you the right phone numbers and the right people to talk to. Just you know make sure and take lots of notes because you'll need them.

Right. Good. Barbara did you want to say something?

Yeah. I just going to say either way you have to go through – whether it's a hospital or a clinic – you have to go through your social worker.

Okay. Are there any educational barriers to getting involved with vocational rehabilitation?

This is Barbara. I don't think so because if you worked previously, there shouldn't be a problem.

Okay.

The issue was you have to be sure and fill out the FICA form and that can be time-consuming and can be very confusing. And you have to be approved for the Pell Grants and keep your grade point average up over 2.0 and go to school full-time and that can be an issue for some people.

Okay. That's a good point. Does anybody want to share any other barriers they overcame to the vocational rehabilitation?

This is Yvonne. I feel vocational rehab is a good program. It truly is and those people that feel that voc rehab could help them should most certainly try to do that. But. I'm only speaking from me. Voc rehab did not help me because what I was looking for – I'm a licensed cosmetologist and barber and masseuse, so they could not help me with that. But what did happen was I met a lot of people. I also got a chance to be on the computer because I would go there and get on the computer and see what I could find. And then there were times when my actual counselor

felt that she had found something for me. And then I would go on those interviews, but it did not work. They were looking for something else. I do recommend the program, but I can say for me it did not work or help me.

Okay. We want to hear all sides, so thank you for sharing. Did anybody else have any barriers that they had to overcome to use vocational rehabilitation? Okay. The next question is “Why would a person want to attend vocational rehabilitation?” And again, if you're not speaking if you could push a star six and then star six again if you want to talk that'd be great.

This is Steve again. My main reason for going into voc rehab was to learn a new career basically because, like I said previously, all my previous positions were bartending and things where I was on my feet. My hips were going out from the medication and I had to, like I said, I had to learn something where I was off my feet and they helped me with that tremendously.

Great. So getting that new, unexplored skill set going. That's great.

This is Richard. I think they give you options to explore, absolutely. If you're in a work set that you've done for many years or at you're last career, exploring your options is definitely great. And you can learn skills, like you said, other skills to continue in life. It's a wonderful opportunity. The resource is there and I think people should take advantage of that when it's made available to them. We encourage it a lot at our units. Never think that you're [inaudible] or whatever. There's little things that you can do just to keep you busy. There's other things to do than to sit at the house and [inaudible] or whatever. You want to stay active. So take advantage of those resources if they're available.

Thank you. Anyone else?

This is Jennifer. The main reason why I think that anybody should go to voc rehab is if a medical condition prohibits you from doing the job that you were doing or the career that you had. To maintain your independence, get yourself reeducated. We all want to maintain our independence as much as possible. We don't want you to have to depend on somebody to take us to the store or to dialysis or you know whatever it may be. We would much rather sustain ourselves for as long as we possibly can.

Good Point. Keeping that independence is very important.

[Inaudible]

Alright. Thank you, Richard. The next question is “What kind of job placement services did you get?”

This is Barbara. I went through a Personnel Services. I think it was Kelly Services, but I can't remember. But what they tried to do was pair me up with what I did previously.

Okay. Thank you. Does anyone else want to share anything about job placement services that they received through vocational rehab?

Well I know that the state of Missouri has the Career Center that always helps those that have completed vocational rehab. Unfortunately I wasn't able to finish it, but I will be, like I said, pursuing to finish that degree. But I know that job services definitely helps because they are a huge advertisement for voc rehab for those that are looking and have no idea what else to do. Or they can at least look into it.

Okay. Good. Anyone else? Okay how about “How much can I work without losing my benefits?”

Which benefits do you mean?

Any assistance that someone would be getting when they weren't working and then they do vocational rehabilitation to get a job – should they be worried about that or Social Security or their Medicare or anything like that?

This is Barbara. Social Security will send you a letter telling you how much you can and can't make or how many hours you can work before they have to adjust your Social Security.

I would just look for that letter then?

Or you can call them and they'll send it out to you.

Okay.

And for food stamps or Medicaid or something like that, you would just have to call your social worker or the Medicare or Medicaid hotline and they can adjust accordingly. It depends on how many people are in the family and dependents etc.

Well you don't you lose your Medicare or Medicaid, but it all depends on how much money you make. As far as your Medicare, they don't mess with that. It's just the amount of money you make.

So I would just consult that letter from Social Security or call them and see.

Yeah just call them and they'll tell you how much you can and can't make.

Great.

Because if you make too much, they'll deduct from your Social Security.

Right. That's good to know.

If I were to go back to work now, I can make up to forty five thousand, but then I'd have to start paying taxes again.

Okay. So it's good that you know that cap number.

Right.

There's also a trial work period that Social Security has where you can work for nine calendar months and earn any amount of money and still receive benefits. But it's always about keeping that communication. There are some programs that Social Security has in place that kind of encourage people to work because that fear of losing benefits is definitely concerning for a lot of people. So you have different programs to help.

Has anyone had experience with the Ticket to Work program?

Okay. Does anyone want to share what kind of work they've done or if they think temporary or permanent employment is better?

This is Yvonne. I'm a licensed cosmetologist, barber, and masseuse. Now I'm no longer – I guess you could say I'm semi-retired because I'm no longer go to the shop as many days as I used to a while ago. But also where I live – and live in a senior complex – there is a duty shop here, so I also do some of the residents here. Now I don't do everybody that lives here and I don't expect to do everybody that lives here. But between that and the days that I do work at the salon, things work out pretty well for me. Now, at one time I was receiving both Medicare and Medicaid. Social Security will call you or send your letter in the mail and then you

have to go in for an interview to see if you can continue to receive whatever type of Medicaid that you have been receiving. Well as the years went on for me, I no longer have Medicaid because they felt that I was making too much money and they could not provide me with that anymore. But I still have my Medicare and the other insurances that I do have.

Okay. That's good to know.

This is Barbara. I always worked in finance. I started at the phone company as a finance manager and then I taught elementary math for a pilot program. So when they started looking, I don't know how they paired me up with the clinic. Maybe it was because of the data entry. That was an interesting job. And then finally I found my own job as finance in the Department of Defense. But after I looked at my finances – I looked at my Social Security and then my pension – I decided it wasn't worth my time going back because I don't want to give Uncle Sam anything. I want to keep all my money. So I chose not to go back. Now, if someone asked me to come and volunteer and help with something, I might do that as long as I don't make over a certain amount of money.

Right. Okay. So that's how you decided what was best for you.

Right.

Great. Thank you. Anybody else? Okay. Our last question is “How do you balance work and/or school and your dialysis schedule?”

This is Yvonne again. I do peritoneal dialysis, so I can set up my own schedule because I don't have to go in center three times a week. So I set up my own schedule. I come and go as I please. So by me doing peritoneal dialysis every night, it does not interfere with anything that I choose to do.

Okay. That's great. Anybody else? Does anybody else have anything that we didn't cover that you want to share about your experience with vocational rehabilitation or working?

This is Jennifer. I recommend it to anybody that can do it if they want to keep as independent as they can to not have to depend on others. And if you're physically able to handle the stress of the situation, then I say go for it. You're never too old to learn – an old mantra of my parents.

Right.

You can always learn something and you can always use that for whatever you're blessed to be able to do it with.

Right. That's a good perspective. Anybody else? Alright. Well thank you so much to all of our participants. We appreciate you joining us today and hearing your experiences on vocational rehabilitation. We look forward to hearing from you in the future.

Thank you.

You have a really beautiful day.

You too. Thank you so much.

Bye-bye.

Thank you.

Thanks everybody.