



## Best Practices for Promoting Vocational Rehabilitation

Midwest Kidney Network gathered the following strategies from facilities in the five participating ESRD Networks in the Innovation Challenge on improving processes for referral and/or utilization of vocational rehabilitation (VR) and employment networks (EN).

### Bulletin Board

Creation of a simple yet informative bulletin board/information center in the waiting room to help make VR more visible to patients. Include information received during the project. Include the VR word search as a fun way for patients to learn more. In doing so, increase conversations with patients regarding VR and returning to work.

### Vocational Rehabilitation Starter Packet

Creation of a VR Starter Packet for when a patient is interested in a VR referral. It's a folder that contains the following items: a congratulatory letter from the clinic providing support for the patient's decision to return to work and our willingness to help in the process, an explanation about DVR, the DVR referral form (which is then completed together), the SSA "Working While Disabled" brochure, the Ticket to Work website info, and the Renal Support Network website info. Also included a pen and a notebook in the packet. The packet was designed with the idea that patients should recognize the value of their decision. It is their first impression of the VR process and provides motivation and encouragement. It not only provides useful information and acts as an organizational tool, but it shows our clinic's support and helps patients to return to a professional mindset.

### Education

Having (education) on a website so patient and/or facility can refer online. Also communicating via email to 1 specific worker would expedite the process. An awareness building event will be hosted. For each shift, patients will be given VR word searches and pencils at the same time and staff will be available to assist to complete. DVR brochures will be available to discuss with patients. Small prizes for participating will be given. Try to repeat annually to maintain. Providing educational handouts and allowing patients to speak with employees from DVR offices have been helpful. Most patients inquire/fear that their benefits would stop if they start working. Allowing DVR to speak with them and review the income guidelines is helpful.

Meeting patients one-on-one is the most important way to educate and get to know our customers. Many patients did not know that they could earn (money) and keep their benefits. Others thought no one would hire them for part time work around their dialysis schedule. Two patients learned from VR contact that they could get free job training. Talking to them one-on-one about what they most feared was the biggest win. Another asset was having a patient liaison who spoke to several patients in the lobby about her work schedule and how she "felt better by working." The patient-to-patient interaction that happened spontaneously in the lobby had a couple of patients wanting to work as well. Token necklaces from Party City (very inexpensive!) were used to recognize or congratulate those who "got a job." They wore them proudly and had others ask them, "Why'd you get that necklace?".

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Patients will be given a sheet of information regarding VR. This sheet will include myths that many patients struggle with when considering employment.

Provide educational sessions to patients during Care Plan assessment on the mental health benefits of pursuing VR. Discuss patient's lifetime goals and assist in developing a plan of action on how they will achieve their goals. Have patients call the DVR program for the area.

Make VR a part of New Patient Education to reach as many patients as possible as soon as possible. By doing this at the on-set of dialysis, it can give the patient something to hold on to that will help them consider the possibility of remaining connected to the community and to their peers through the possibility of working. Speak about successful VR referrals. Bulletin boards in the facilities announce the Vocational Rehab Rocks program for our patients. If patients who are already on dialysis wish to explore VR and have not yet been told about VR, they can fill out an "Interest Card" which will be placed by the bulletin board. Social workers will then make the opportunity to speak with them if they have not yet been approached about VR. As a reminder of the conversation, small painted rocks, with the words "Vocational Rehab Rocks" will be given to the patient after the education is completed.

### **Referral creation**

Create a referral form that can be faxed from the facility to DVR. Create a list of individuals along with contact information for the counselors at each DVR office.

### **Newsletter**

Facility developed and distributed a "Get Back to Work!" newsletter to all patients. It included information on local VR service, the benefits of employment while on dialysis, and advice from working dialysis patients. The facility is also working to secure local DVR staff for a lobby day to talk with patients about employment options.

### **Speaker representative**

Invited the CEO of our local VR center to come and speak with patients. Asked if the local VR program had any participants that would like to come and speak to dialysis patients about their own success stories. Many patients are "interested" in the ticket to work program, but very few have called the number to explore. Patients seem to be fearful of lack of success, uncertain of what types of jobs are out there and seem to have some general distrust that they would not lose their disability benefits. Hopefully, more education and information about the local VR program with success stories will help extinguish some of the fears and misconceptions that patients seem to have about the Ticket to Work Program. Discussing making this a fun "career day" party during dialysis.