Overview

• Introduction to presenters
• Employment & MS
• Barriers to employment
• Overcoming work barriers
• Work and MS project
• Current Work and MS trial
Introduction

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• MS Research Australia

Employment: the not-so-good news

Research indicates: 1,2
• A low employment rate among adults with MS

The main issue is maintaining work:
• Few remain in full-time employment
• Those who remain employed often retire early due to their MS
Barriers to employment success

Challenges to finding and maintaining work: 1, 2, 3

• Medical
  • problems with mobility, vision, pain, fatigue etc

• Environment
  • transport
  • physical workplace

• Social
  • attitudes of employers, health professionals

• Emotional
  • confidence in managing workplace experiences
  • concerns about MS disclosure
  • low mood

Service gaps

• Early vocational intervention can help familiarise individuals with MS with the types of problems they may encounter later and possible sources of help to turn to when the need arises.

• Provision of MS-specific vocational rehabilitation services is limited by resource/funding issues.

• Accessible and effective methods of providing vocational support are needed.
Overcoming work barriers

- Increase your knowledge about the job market
- Learn how to better self-manage some MS symptoms
- Learn how to better manage low spots in your mood
- Increase your support network during the job hunting process
- Having on-the-job assistance

Employment: the good news!

We also know that:

- Many have the ability to work
- Many still want to work
- Work has benefits
- Many work effectively once appropriate adjustments to the job and/or workplace environment are made
- Returning to work for a previous employer (your employer prior to the diagnosis of MS) is the most successful path
A solution?

- Develop an evidence based intervention that is
  - widely available
  - acceptable
  - effective

Aims

- To develop and test an email-based information package for job-seekers with MS: *Work and MS*
- Identify factors that promote or limit participation in *Work and MS*
**Work and MS: research questions**

- Is *Work and MS* an effective support?
  - Use an easy method of collecting data: online survey
  - Determine effectiveness by providing survey before and after individuals have accessed *Work and MS*
  - Survey to focus on: job attitude, mood, life satisfaction

- Is *Work and MS* an acceptable support?
  - Opportunity to comment on the modules via survey or phone interview

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**Work and MS: what was done**

**Step 1**

- Review past research and develop a resource package.
- Important to include:
  - Job interviewing and resume skills
  - How to identify your job skills and interests
  - How to cope with work-related issues
  - Coping with MS symptoms
  - List available job accommodations/resources
Work and MS: what was done

- 6 module program
  - Module 1: Job facts
  - Module 2: Finding a new job
  - Module 3: Resume writing and interview preparation
  - Module 4: Job interview do's and don'ts
  - Module 5: Maintaining work
  - Module 6: Career development
- Modules emailed to individual participants
- Module activities
- Clinician support via email (if required)

Step 2

- Tested on 8 adults from MS Society of SA/NT
- Each found acceptable
- Minor edits to wording/language made
**Work and MS: what was done**

**Step 3**
- Larger sample tested
- Recruitment by social media: MS Research Australia, MS Society of SA and NT, MS Society of WA
- This included adults currently employed and those seeking employment and/or wanting to return to the workforce

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**Work and MS results**

**Participants**
- 27 female, 2 males
- Average 44 years of age (range = 28 to 60)
- 86% relapsing remitting
- MS symptoms
  - pain (59%), cognition (59%), walking (55%), dexterity (48%), bladder/bowel (41%), vision (28%), swallowing (24%), speech (21%)
- Average time since diagnosis: 8.5 years
- Employment (paid):
  - before diagnosis: 86%; after diagnosis: 59%
Work and MS results

- Dissatisfaction with employment services: 57%
- Barriers to work
  - MS 83%, work environment 35%, transport 21%

"I found the information useful. Just scored a new job"
**Work and MS results**

- 62% completed both (before and after) surveys

**Why did people drop out?**
  - Illness (worsening MS symptoms)
  - Other time commitments
  - Not job-seeking

**Lessons learnt**

- Convenience of *Work and MS*
- Targeted information for job-seekers with MS can be effectively delivered by email
- Supplemental clinician support not always needed
Next steps...

• Trial with other disability groups
• Trial with younger age groups
• Trial an online platform

Current *Work and MS* trial

• Controlled design
• Trial with a larger sample
• Recruitment through social media:
  • MS Society of SA & NT
  • MS Society of Queensland
  • MS Advisory Committee
  • MS Employment Support Service
• Evaluate the benefits
Volunteers needed...

Please consider participating if:

- you are an adult (aged 18 years) with MS
- have access to a pc
- are currently looking for work

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Work_and_MS_2016_pre

References (for those interested)


We are grateful for the assistance of:
MS Research Australia
MS Society of South Australia and the Northern Territory
MS Society of Western Australia
Study participants who kindly donated their time

Thank you!