

Minnesota's RETAIN Grant Abstract Summary:

The goal of the Minnesota Retaining Employment and Talent after Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) project is to facilitate early intervention strategies to support workers in staying at or returning to work after illness or injury and to prevent unnecessary disability and worklessness. The team will involve a closely integrated group of partners with a shared focus on reducing disability for residents of the state and consistently utilizing a proactive approach to stay at work/return to work. With the ultimate goal of assisting employees in staying at or returning to work after injury or illness, our team believes the interventions will minimize absenteeism and lost productivity. The MN RETAIN pilot and demonstration project will involve partnership between the MN Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), MN Department of Labor and Industry (DLI), MN Department of Health (MDH), Workforce Development, Inc. (WDI), Governor's Workforce Development Workforce Board, HealthForce MN, and Mayo Clinic return to work specialists and healthcare providers, and regional employers. Collaboration with insurers, QRCs/Disability Case Managers and other stakeholders with the shared purpose of assisting employees to return to work will also be employed as appropriate.

Mayo Clinic has experience in improving the likelihood that employees will remain in the workforce related directly to education of employees, management, and health care providers about the value of work and retention of work expertise and connecting that philosophy to the organization's key values. Coming from an initial position of no return to work unless employees were 100% recovered, Mayo Clinic rapidly moved to one of work as a critical element of recovery and embraced the concept of assisting all employees, regardless of the nature or case of the condition, to have access to care and services all designed to help the employee stay at or return to work and achieve an optimum level of productivity.

The success of Mayo's existing internal program is ensured by several factors, including:

- Policy development that communicates organizational support and identifies stakeholder expectations and responsibilities
- Creating a marketing campaign with education materials for distribution on a broad scale of the organization's support of and as well as 'just in time' information to help an individual employee and manager construct a plan to return to work
- Early identification of an absence or inability to perform required work activities to assist employees and managers with the development of a 'plan to work' schedule
- An appointed person, in our case a Return to Work Coordinator, responsible to communicate and create the collaboration between employee, provider and manager necessary to provide accommodations required for a safe return to work.

- Acknowledging that anxiety and emotional responses are normal after an injury and illness and can be significantly allayed by a collaborative alliance with the healthcare provider and employer
- Develop a job bank of transitional work assignments that will allow options for employees returning with a wide variety of capabilities and in all stages of illness/injury recovery
- Provide job search support for employees who need to consider alternate career paths
- Establish metrics to evaluate program success and opportunities to make improvements.

Having demonstrated success at Mayo Clinic, we believe that a strong collaboration with the partners mentioned above, positions all of us to provide similar benefits on a broader scale for employees and their employers in Minnesota. With a provider base well versed in the concepts of occupational medicine; experienced return to work coordinators who have proficiency working with employees with diverse backgrounds, education, work experience and types of impairments, and knowledge of the ADA interactive process and accommodations; and a state agency that has vocational expertise to coach employees for job success, we can as a team offer employees and employers in the local 11 county region the right resources. This will include medical teams of experts for health care delivery that includes the concept of work as part of the medical treatment plan, return to work experts to establish effective stay at work and return to work employer programs to minimize job loss and workforce specialists with connections to local employers to offer vocational assessment, counseling, with earlier intervention than what has been practiced previously, particularly for those employees who have non-occupational medical conditions. As a group we are excited by the prospect of making an impactful difference to employees, their families and communities, and the state of Minnesota by participating together in this important initiative.