

# Charity Profile – The Shaw Trust: vocational rehabilitation support

**W**hile most patients working with therapists will have a successful return to their previous job following ill health or a personal injury, others may need a new direction, or even complete career change, and require one to one support in finding new or alternative employment.

In tough economic times and times of recession, having a competitive edge becomes paramount to securing employment, and vocational rehabilitation can be critical in giving people the support and skills they need to get back to work.

## Vocational rehabilitation

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) and the promotion of early intervention is designed to complement other practitioners, whether that be physiotherapists, occupational therapists or rehabilitation programmes, and enhance the services for patients – or clients – looking for assistance in returning to work.

Holistically working with the patient, and in some cases with and alongside their treating practitioner, the VR consultant identifies the patient's transferable skills, together with the local training and employment opportunities, to ensure that a safe return to suitable work can be achieved with medical approval.

However, with tight purse strings and differing streams of funding for services through government initiatives or private rehabilitation, it can often mean that obtaining vocational rehabilitation support for patients is excessively bureaucratic. This, coupled with the 'benefit trap' the patient may have fallen into, and the lack of well-being that worklessness can instil, may sometimes leave the patient disempowered at a time when confidence is already low due to their capacity.

Those employers without occupational provision may find they need to source occupational and vocational expertise for guidance. The recent launch of the 'Fit Note' will exacerbate this requirement;

GP's are unable to visit the employers' workplace to discuss the advice given with employers, and consequently, ergonomic assessments, adjustments to the workplace, terms and conditions and an objective assessment of the patient's physical functional capacity can fall to the employer.

A good vocational practitioner will guide the employer through the process (as well as provide one to one support for the patient) of an employee returning to work, with reasonable adjustments where appropriate. Often, employers are not aware of where to source assistive devices, types of equipment available and if in fact 'Access to Work' could provide funding for any such items. Many adjustments are job alterations and considerations that do not incur cost.

With health and well-being becoming increasingly important on the employment agenda, Shaw Trust, the UK's largest third sector provider of specialist skills and employment services, has launched a unique specialist Vocational Rehabilitation Assessment and Support Service for patients going through personal injury or life, health and protection claims. The charity is also providing Absence Management support for employers.

An experienced VR team can not only act as the conduit between employer and employee, ensuring that each party finds a resolution that is satisfactory and sustainable, but can also, by working with insurers and solicitors in line with the Rehabilitation Code of Best Practice, reduce the negative social impact and ensure focused return to work outcomes for patients.

## WORKING WITH CANCER

Macmillan Cancer Support has found 80 percent of patients are not being warned about the impact cancer could have on their career and, despite successful treatment, many have lost their jobs. The research also highlighted that many people are un-

ware that cancer is now included under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, soon to be the Equality Act 2010, which will protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all.

Macmillan is calling on the new UK government to provide better long-term support to cancer patients and help them get back into work. The charity is currently collaborating with Shaw Trust on a new model of vocational rehabilitation provision to do just that. Using its 27 years of experience in getting 16,000 people back into work every year, Shaw Trust has a ready-made national employment network to support Macmillan and can provide knowledge of the local market.

In addition, the organization has reviewed and adapted models from around the world such as Finland, Spain and South Korea, all of which have VR models within the context of their own legislative frameworks. In gathering a wealth of evidence-based approaches and applying to its VR offer, Shaw Trust meets the Vocational Rehabilitation Association Standards and delivers best practice.

While rehabilitation in its wider context is a long road to recovery for patients, Shaw Trust has recognized that the same importance should be given to the vocational aspect of someone's life, which not only rebuilds their economic independence, and confidence, but feeds into our country's economic re-growth and our social responsibility. **IJTR**

Fit Note: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/fitnote/>  
 Access to Work: <http://tinyurl.com/3ajvk6f>  
 Rehabilitation Code of Best Practice: <http://www.bicma.org.uk/cobp.php>  
 Vocational Rehabilitation Association Standards: <http://tinyurl.com/32wkfnl>

**Karen Elsmore**

*Client Relationship Manager,  
 Shaw Trust,  
 Chippenham,  
 Wiltshire, UK  
[vrservices@shaw-trust.org.uk](mailto:vrservices@shaw-trust.org.uk)*

For more information, please see:  
[www.vrservices.org.uk](http://www.vrservices.org.uk)