

Introduction: Engaging Employers to Prevent Disability

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Keeping us healthy and fit for work until retirement is a growing problem in many countries. This challenge is noted globally where years of declining health and increasing rates of chronic health conditions with and without co-morbidities has resulted in growing disability rates and a high burden on social disability and insurance systems. Research tells us that this problem cannot be solved without the engagement and support of employers, both large and small. This special issue is the product of an invited conference focused on improving research of employer policies and practices to prevent disability. It was led by an exceptional organizing committee (Drs. Anema, Linton, Main, Nicholas, Pransky, and Shaw) whose goal was to re-energize disability and rehabilitation research focusing on the critical role of employers. They superbly orchestrated a meeting in October 2015 at the Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety in Hopkinton, Massachusetts to bring together some of the world's leaders in this area of research. Each of the organizers and participants was very involved in producing a collection of exceptionally high quality collaborative papers, which are featured in this special issue of the *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*.

The Journal is honored to be publishing this special issue and grateful to all of the very talented contributors involved. The papers in this issue of the Journal provide not only a state-of-the-art review of employer factors and interventions but also provide information about research design challenges and recommendations that will be useful for anyone planning research in this domain. Practitioners will also appreciate the efforts to include information from the “grey

literature” and to highlight issues of employer decision-making and implementation. All of the papers have been published as “Open Access” and can be accessed freely on the SpringerLink website (<http://www.springer.com/medicine/journal/10926/PSE>). We trust that you will find this work helpful in your efforts to improve the understanding, prevention, and management of work disability.

With this issue, the Journal completes its 26th year of publication. In 1991, when the first issue was published, I emphasized the need for “a new approach to the problem of work disability, one that truly attempts to integrate the diverse groups and approaches of the past and seeks to develop new knowledge and strategies.” Research and practice have progressed a long way in the past 26 years; however, the difficulty of integrating rehabilitation efforts of clinicians with employer support and accommodation in the workplace remains a major challenge even today. More research on employer practices, especially those that engage both workers and employers to participate more fully in research design and development, are sorely needed.

Lastly, the contents of this special issue reflect the challenges of preventing disability in a changing work and health environment—one characterized by nonconventional working arrangements, limited work contracts, higher work demands and skill requirements, recurrent or chronic symptom patterns, older workers, mobile or distance workers, and sometimes limited opportunities for modified or alternate work. Understanding how employer policies and practices can be effectively implemented amid these new working conditions is an important research goal for the next 25 years. I invite researchers who study work disability related to all types of injuries and illnesses to submit their work to the Journal.

I trust you will find the papers in this special issue stimulating and informative. All the best for the coming New Year!

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