CATCH the SPIRIT

SCI&D SPIRIT

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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
VA Boston Healthcare System
Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders

Making History

On July 6, 2011, twenty-one year old Midshipman, Kevin Hillery, arrived at the VA Boston Healthcare System with a complete T11 paraplegic injury sustained in a freak mountain biking accident . He had completed three years of study at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD where he was pursuing a major in Economics and minor in French. His career goal then had been to study law and serve in the Navy as a JAG attorney.

During his stay, Kevin was motivated to continue on fully with his life and worked diligently at his rehab program of physical, occupational, aquatic and recreational therapies. When he learned that he could not return to the Naval Academy to complete his undergraduate studies, Kevin challenged the Navy's decision as he was determined to graduate with his class.

Kevin Hillery receives his degree from the U.S. Naval Academy

He recognizes that this provided additional motivation to succeed in rehab and helped his emotional recovery post injury. Kevin states that he became less focused on the paraplegia, paying more attention to his ultimate goal of returning to the Naval Academy. He also admits that he worked "extra hard" to appear healthy and strong on his first trip back to Annapolis post injury.

The young Veteran speaks highly of the team who cared for and worked with him at the VA, especially the nurses and rehab therapists. He had been an avid cyclist and is grateful to the VA for being able to continue his favorite sport. Kevin states *"The VA was great, They got a hand cycle for me which was huge. I use it pretty much every day!"* In fact, in October 2011, just one month after discharge from inpatient rehab in West Roxbury, Kevin competed in the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, DC on his hand cycle.

Kevin persisted in his attempt to return to the Academy. With the support of family, friends and officials, he was allowed to complete his education as planned. He graduated from the Naval Academy with his class on May 29, 2012 and made history as the first graduate with paraplegia. As Kevin wheeled up to the commencement podium, he was genuinely surprised by the ovation he received and the subsequent media attention.

A spinal cord injury may have changed this veteran's life; however it did not diminish his spirit or his dreams. Kevin could not be commissioned as an officer and was discharged from the Navy on May 31st He will begin law school at Georgetown in September 2012 and also plans to compete in more hand cycle races.

Promoting Employment after SCI

Sunil Sabharwal, MD
Chief SCI/D Services

People with spinal cord injury who are employed experience significantly better quality of life and life satisfaction, among other benefits. Yet the average rate of employment following SCI is much lower than the employment rate for persons without disabilities in the US. Veterans make great hires! Veterans bring discipline, focus and organizational skills from their military experience; know how to work efficiently and effectively under pressure; and have a strong sense of accountability and trustworthiness.

Evidence-Based Supported Employment is a tested and validated employment method with the following principles: Desire to work initiates service; Personal preferences are honored; Job search starts right away; No pre-employment evaluation or tests; Competitive employment is the goal; Vocational and clinical staff work together; Support continues when job is obtained; Benefits counseling is offered. *Read more in this newsletter about research going on in our SCI Center to examine effects of enhanced vocational rehabilitation and job search assistance and support.*

Summertime at Sunapee

The 3rd annual VA New England Summer Sports Clinic was held in Sunapee, NH from July 24 -26, 2012. Veterans came from all over New England to enjoy the games. The Veterans, their caretakers and family members participated in multiple events including: kayaking, water skiing, fly fishing, wall climbing, as well as a new event: geo-caching.

There was also a biathlon challenge which included hand cycling and shooting. Attendees were grouped into four teams and points were earned in order to determine a winner. This year the Bears won the most points. Congratulations to the Bears!

Amanda Curry, occupational therapist, volunteered her time to assist with the games. Many PVA members and VA employees were also in attendance. Overall, the clinic was very successful and a good time was had by all.

Veteran Roland Fillion takes aim.

Veteran Ed Dusick and Volunteers from Healing Waters make 'flies'.

Veteran David Santamore sets off for a kayak ride.

PrOMOTE: Putting Veterans with SCI Back to Work

Dan Edelston, M.S., C.R.C.
Vocational Rehab Specialist

PrOMOTE is a project funded by VA Rehabilitation Research and Development. It examines the effects of enhanced vocational rehabilitation and job search assistance on competitive employment in Veterans with SCI/D.

Two new members have joined the SCI team to implement and sustain the project. Dan Edelston earned his Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Massachusetts. Kandarp (Kan) Mehta is a U.S. Army Veteran who earned his Master of Science from Long Island University, New York

Kandarp (Kan) Mehta, M.S.
PrOMOTE Project Coordinator

Who is eligible? If you are a Veteran with a spinal cord injury who receives care at the VA Health Care System and are between the ages of 18 and 65, you are eligible for a baseline interview. At the baseline interview, you will complete questionnaires that focus on your health, quality of life, education, and other areas. At the end of the baseline interview, you will be screened for Supported Employment. If you want a paying job in the community, anticipate living within 100 miles of the VA Boston Healthcare System for the next two years, and don't currently have a paying job, you will be eligible for Supported Employment through this project.

What will you have to do? You will work with the Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist (VRS). Your VRS will meet with you to determine your work goals and then go out in the community and help ensure that employers know of your skills and capabilities. Once you are hired, he will continue to meet with you to help overcome barriers to your continued success and advancement. You will meet with the Project Coordinator every three months for a follow-up interview.

What will you receive? Payment in varying amounts for each interview; the satisfaction of helping improve services for Veterans; and Individualized Supported Employment.

If you would like to learn more about and take part in the PrOMOTE program, please call Kan Mehta at 857-203-6557.

SCI Nurses Deserving Special Recognition

Sue Clark is an LPN on the acute spinal cord injury unit at the VA Boston Healthcare System. She was nominated and selected for the VA Boston HCS Employee of the Month Award in June 2012.

She volunteers to accompany the SCI Veterans and the Recreational Therapist, Bruce Peirce, on the frequently scheduled outings (movies, mall, ball games, canoe trips, etc.).

Sue consistently goes above and beyond. Her commitment and dedication to improving the quality of life of the SCI Veterans truly deserves special recognition. Sue, thanks for all you do!

Sue Clark, LPN

Megan McGarry, RN

Megan McGarry has been working as an LPN on the acute spinal cord injury unit at the VA Boston HCS while pursuing a higher degree.

She is a valuable member of the SCI rehabilitation team. Her consistent participation and contributions on wound care rounds is greatly appreciated and doesn't go unrecognized.

Megan graduated from Massasoit Community College in May 2012 and obtained her RN license in July 2012. Her determination to reach this goal, while working and balancing her family commitments has been commendable.

Vaccine-Preventable Diseases and the Vaccines that Prevent Them

Your healthcare team wants to help you prevent disease! Regardless of your age, we ALL need immunizations to keep us healthy. With time, immunity from childhood vaccines can fade and put you at risk for new and different diseases. Following immunization guidelines protects you and your loved ones. In addition to the seasonal influenza vaccine, there are several immunizations your health providers may recommend.

Tetanus ("Lockjaw")

- Can be prevented by Tdap or Td vaccine every ten years

Tetanus is caused by bacteria found in soil. The bacteria enter the body through a wound. When people are infected, the bacteria produce a poison that causes serious, painful spasms and stiffness of all muscles in the body. Complete recovery from tetanus can take months.

Diphtheria

- Can be prevented by Tdap or Td vaccine

Diphtheria is a very contagious bacterial disease that affects the respiratory system, including the lungs. Bacteria can be passed from person to person by direct contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze. When people are infected, the diphtheria bacteria produce a poison that can cause weakness, sore throat, low-grade fever, and swollen glands in the neck. Effects from this toxin can lead to heart failure, coma, paralysis, and even death.

Pertussis ('Whooping Cough")

- Can be prevented by Tdap vaccine

Pertussis is caused by bacteria spread through direct contact with respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can cause violent coughing for weeks, making it difficult to breathe, drink, or eat.

Zoster ('Shingles", "Herpes Zoster")

- Can be prevented by the zoster vaccine once for adults 60 or older

Shingles is caused by the chickenpox virus. After a person recovers from chickenpox, the virus stays in the body in an inactive state. For reasons that are not fully known, the virus can reactivate years later, causing shingles.

Pneumococcal Disease

- Can be prevented by Pneumococcal vaccine when diagnosed with specific health issues, such as SCI regardless of age, and for all persons 65 years or older

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs that can be caused by the bacteria called pneumococcus. It spreads when people cough or sneeze. These bacteria can cause other types of infections too, such as sinus infections, meningitis, and blood stream infection. Some cases of pneumococcal disease can be fatal. Many people have the bacteria in their nose or throat at one time or another without being ill which is known as being a carrier.

Reference: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (http://www.cdc.gov).

Caregiver Corner

CAREGIVER HEALTH

You may have noticed that we have been asking primary caregivers living with SCI/D Veterans to complete a short survey at the veteran's annual evaluation exam or homecare visit. Health professionals acknowledge that caregivers often take better care of their loved ones than they do of themselves. Our Veterans' caregivers are no exception, with several reporting that their own health has suffered to some degree. Caregivers are encouraged to make and keep medical appointments, to follow up on their physicians' recommendations, and to keep their immunizations up to date.

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West Roxbury, MA 02132

800-865-3384

http://www.boston.va.gov
Facebook: VA Boston Healthcare System

Veteran Veteran
1 Veteran Way
Boston, MA 02122

SCI Employees and Job Satisfaction

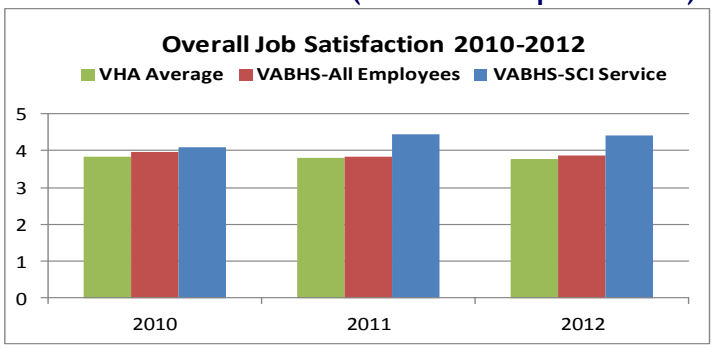
Satisfied employees and a healthy work place are of utmost importance to provide the care our Veterans deserve. Workplace studies show that greater employee job satisfaction is associated with lower employee turnover, productive behaviors, and lower burnout, and also with important health outcomes (such as patient care quality, patient satisfaction).

VA conducts a confidential and anonymous All Employee Survey (AES) each year in an ongoing effort to assess employees' satisfaction, to eliminate barriers to employees' effectiveness, and to make VA an employer of choice for our employees.

The survey includes 13 items asking the employee about their individual satisfaction with key job functions (**Job Satisfaction Index**), and 31 items assessing employees perceptions of their immediate workgroup (**Organizational Assessment Inventory)**

Each item on the Job Satisfaction Index is measured using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all satisfied*) to 5 (*very satisfied*).

Overall Job Satisfaction (rated on a 5 point scale)



Our Results

- SCI Service staff consistently report significantly higher overall job satisfaction (Figure 1) than the national VA average and the average for all employees at the VA Boston Health Care System (VABHS)

- SCI staff gave higher scores for all individual items assessed in the 2012 survey compared to the VA & VABHS averages. Items highest rated by SCI staff were "Work Quality" (4.68), "Supervision" (4.56), & "Work Type" (4.44) on a 5 point scale.