

RETAIN Kentucky Podcast Series 1, Episode 1

Introduction to RETAIN

Hello and welcome to the inaugural RETAIN Kentucky podcast. I'm Dr Kathy Sheppard-Jones and I'm going to be your guide on this journey. Full disclosure, this is my first podcast ever. I guess I always thought one had to be incredibly important or be seeking worldwide media domination to have a pod cast, and I'm neither. But I'm doing this for a few other reasons that I hope you will find to be worthwhile. The first reason is that is because the topic is incredibly important. RETAIN KY is about keeping people in the labor force. The second reason is that a podcast is a nice way to reach out and provide good information in what is meant to be an easily digestible way. You can be doing other tasks, maybe you've driving, maybe you are hanging on my every word coming through your earbuds, but regardless, you get to choose when and where you want to get this information. The third reason is that I am very earnest about my desire to provide you with information that can help you be better at your job. Not to say you aren't amazing already. I'm sure you are. But I want you to want to understand what RETAIN Kentucky is and how it can help you. The target audience for this podcast is physicians and for the health care industry. And that's another reason I'm so darn excited about what we've set out to do. I'll try to keep my enthusiasm in check. But let's start with getting a handle on what the heck RETAIN Kentucky is.

We won't start at the very beginning, because this podcast is not a history lesson. It is an overview. RETAIN Kentucky was funded under a grant competition held by the US Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy. RETAIN is short for Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury or Illness Network. It is also in collaboration with the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), and the Social Security Administration (SSA). In 2018, Kentucky competed and received a Phase I demonstration grant of nearly \$2.5 million grant, along with seven other states. Those states are:

California

Connecticut

Kansas

Minnesota

Ohio

Vermont

Washington

Since this is a grant, we had to propose a set of ideas and how we planned to carry them out. RETAIN Demonstration Projects all must test the impact of early intervention strategies that improve stay-at-work/return-to-work (SAW/RTW) outcomes of individuals who experience an injury or illness while they are employed. Early health care and employment-related coordination are integral to the project. Because of this, here in Kentucky, we've decided to focus our Phase I efforts on the health care sector as our major employer focus. Our Phase I project efforts are taking place in Jefferson and surrounding counties of Bullitt, Henry, Oldham, Shelby, Spencer and Trimble. In this region of the state, by 2024, healthcare support occupations are projected to grow 28.7% and healthcare practitioners & technical occupations are projected to grow 28.5%. We are also focusing on people who experience an injury or illness that is not considered an on the job injury. There is a worker's compensation mechanism that already exists to assist these workers. We were interested in workers who, when they are not at work, have a musculoskeletal injury or illness. While there is great emphasis for employers around the costs of work injuries, off the job injuries and illnesses are eight times more frequent. It just makes sense, doesn't it? There is a great deal of life that happens away from the job. Those non work hours when we run after kids, nourish our bodies and our minds, connect with our family and friends, help make our communities better. All those activities are important, and potentially dangerous. We'd be safest in a bubble, but disease can find us there as well, and

RETAIN KY is seeking out employees who have had an injury, illness or surgery that affects muscle, joint or bone. From falls or strains that happen when doing chores at home, playing sports or doing yard work. In Kentucky, 34.4% of people who are receiving social security disability insurance have a musculoskeletal or connective tissue disability. Therefore, we are addressing some critical needs in a high growth sector of the workforce.

Back to how this impacts you and the healthcare sector. Let's re-cap who is eligible to participate in RETAIN. Number one - Patients must have a musculoskeletal injury or **illness that is not work-related**. An emphasis is also being placed on workers with substance use disorders that are co-existing or that develop after the injury or illness.

Number Two – Patients must be employed by a healthcare organization. The types of jobs are varied, from food service to physician to everything in between but the employer must be in the healthcare sector. Number Three – Patients must not have applied for or are not be receiving federal disability benefits. This includes Social Security Disability Insurance or Supplemental Security Income. There is a reason for this. We want to provide early intervention services BEFORE a patient is in the benefits pipeline. I mentioned before that this is a model demonstration project and we are seeking to demonstrate the impact of early intervention for this pool of workers.

This is a good time to remind you why you are listening to this podcast. Because you are a critical element in the success of getting a patient back to work. As a physician, you want what is best for your patient, and the healthcare system, in a sense, is the gatekeeper to employment. You convey to your patient what you believe is possible. When that patient has achieved maximum medical improvement. What the probability of getting back to work may be. And years of research tell us that the majority of the time, for a whole slew of reasons, people are better off working than not.

What's in it for the patient? A lot. RETAIN KY can help patients keep their job and income, avoid long-term unemployment, speed medical recovery, reduce the risk of re-injury or relapse, help the patient stay physically conditioned and mentally alert. Patients can maintain job skills, keep the daily routine and social connections. This all can reduce the impact on family, and potentially reduce the likelihood of a secondary condition that can delay or complicate recovery. We've heard a theme arise around difficulty accessing transportation, food and childcare. We hear that. Patients receive coordinated services and supports. Patients receive job site analysis, peer mentoring, and assistive technology. Patients get help in managing their non-work-related injury or illness with our team of Return to Work Coordinators. Patients get their own guide, like a RETAIN Kentucky Sherpa – Return to work Coordinators connect patients to resources, technology, and people who can help them successfully return to work.

How does the referral process work? It should be easy. Physicians will receive project information about RETAIN Kentucky. There are pretty information sheets that give the important details including what I'm covering in this podcast. The patient signs a release form and the physician refers to RETAIN Kentucky. The toll-free number for RETAIN Return to Work Coordinators is 844-804-8725. There is also an email address that is retain@catholichealth.net

You may be wondering how complicated is it to launch a project like this? Well, it takes a lot of committed partners to make it happen. The RETAIN Kentucky team organizational partners are:

University of Louisville Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, Kentucky Department of Workforce Investment, CHI Saint Joseph Health Partners, Coalition for Workforce Diversity, Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Kentucky Department for Public Health, Kentucky Department of Workers' Claims, Kentucky Disability Determination Services, Kentucky Hospital Association, Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, The Council of State Governments, Kentuckiana Works Workforce Development Board, University of Kentucky Human Development Institute

What are the takeaway messages here? One is that RETAIN KY gives a segment of the workforce access to early return to work stay at work interventions that we've never had before. Another is that referral is pretty easy.

The work of RETAIN Kentucky has the potential to make a real difference in people's lives. Hear me now and believe me later. This could be you. It could be someone you love. It could be any of us. I'm the Executive Director of Kentucky's University Center on Disability, and I can tell you that nearly one-third of Kentuckians have a disability, according to recent data shared by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. So, this isn't a matter of us and them. It impacts all of us. People with disabilities are at a disadvantage in terms of economic self-sufficiency and quality of life. We'll talk more about this another time. But one of the ways that we address this is to consider the array of reasons that people are disconnected from the workforce and that means all people. RETAIN Kentucky gives us a powerful set of tools to keep people employed, productive, contributing and included in the employment arena. The time is now. Let's do good work together. =

I am hoping that we follow up this first podcast with other topics that are relevant, including the social security system in Kentucky. I'm going to try to bring on a guest who can shed some light on the history here in the Commonwealth. We'll also hear from other partners in RETAIN Kentucky. We need a variety of perspectives to help us get a handle on the slew of issues that can disconnect a person from work. Our job is to RETAIN them.

If you have questions about RETAIN Kentucky, you can call me at 859.257.8104 or email me at kjone@uky.edu. Thanks for spending part of your day with me.

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