

Hello, and welcome to the RETAIN Kentucky Podcast. I'm Dr. Kathy Sheppard-Jones, and I'm continuing on as your guide through this journey. This is now my second podcast, so I am now officially an expert, right? No. But, I do retain my enthusiasm for the work of RETAIN Kentucky. My RETAIN colleagues know how important this topic is, as RETAIN Kentucky is about keeping people in the labor force. We're reaching out to employers in this - our second podcast episode. And if you're involved in leadership of an organization, even though structures and missions are all different, the one common theme is that there aren't enough hours in the day, right? So, this podcast is our attempt to provide you with information that can help you and your organization without burdening you with yet another meeting, yet another calendar invitation, and another to-do item to cross off of your list. Podcasts are rejuvenating and informative. It's kind of like a knowledge-gaining lifehack. I want you to learn about RETAIN Kentucky because it can help you keep good employees, improve processes, and build and grow your staff. And, because we're focusing on the healthcare industry, we know that can be challenging. So, let's go on this little podcast adventure together, shall we? We're going to talk with my friend and colleague, Shirley Kron in just a minute, but let's make sure we start off on the right foot. For a little background information, RETAIN is short for Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury or Illness Network. And Kentucky was one of eight states that were funded under grant competition help by the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy. It is also in collaboration with the Employment and Training Administration and the U.S. Department of Labor; and the Social Security Administration. RETAIN Kentucky includes some really interesting partnerships, and a very important one involves St. Joseph Health System. I'm pleased that Shirley Kron - our Employee Liaison with Kentucky RETAIN is talking with us today. So, Shirley, tell us a little bit about your background.

Thank you, Kathy, I am fortunate to be part of the RETAIN Kentucky team. As Kathy mentioned, I am the Employer Liaison for RETAIN Kentucky. I have worked in healthcare for over 40 years. I'm a nurse by training and have been certified as an occupational health nurse since 1998. I have worked with employers across the Commonwealth to keep their employees healthy and on the job. Employees are one of an employer's greatest assets, and healthy employees are very much aligned with the long-term health of the employer's bottom line. I like to think of myself as a connector. My job as the Employer Liaison for RETAIN Kentucky is to identify employers who are interested in participating in RETAIN and connecting them to valuable resources and staff available to them through RETAIN Kentucky.

So, Shirley, what does an employer have to do in order to participate?

The first thing I want employers to remember Kathy, is that they are part of our RETAIN Kentucky team. They will work directly with Return-to-Work Coordinators and other project staff to assess the impact of stay-at-work and return-to-work activities for workers who are ill or injured. The employer will identify a designated contact person, and that opens the door to all RETAIN services. So, Shirley, tell me a little bit more about the designated contact person that you mentioned. Kathy, they are really the link between our Return-to-Work coordinators, physicians, and the employee. For instance, they would share information such as job descriptions, and return-to-work policies, which would assist in early return to work for the employee. We will work hand-in-hand with the contact person; providing training on RETAIN

and being available for any questions. RETAIN Kentucky will develop promotional materials for them to share with their staff, through the employer newsletters, management meetings, and benefit fairs.

So, it sounds like these services and supports can be really individualized to fit the needs of the employers.

Exactly.

Shirley, you've talked about supports and services through RETAIN Kentucky; specifically, what does that mean for employers?

Kathy, central to the RETAIN Kentucky project is early coordination of healthcare and employment related supports and services, to help the injured or ill workers remain in the workforce; such as education, training, and technical assistance around any stay-at-work or return-to-work issues your employees may be facing. Active involvement of a return-to-work coordinator throughout the medical recovery period to facilitate continued employment, and connection to specialized expertise, such as assistive technology and peer support, accommodations and job modifications, retraining and rehabilitation services if needed.

So, it's really a whole array of supports that can be provided, but it's based on what that individual employee may be experiencing.

Yes Kathy, this is very customized to each individual's' illness or injury.

And I don't think we've actually mentioned Shirley, who the target employee is that we are looking to work with are.

The employee is anyone who has experienced a musculoskeletal injury or illness and work currently for a healthcare organization.

And I think it is kind of interesting that the twist to this is that we're also wanting to work with those employees who experience that injury or illness - not on the job. Something that would be, that happens outside of work, right?

Yes, often times this occurs eight times more than a work-related injury, and this is really an injury or illness that may not be as tightly controlled.

And, it is also a group of injuries and illnesses that really have a huge impact on workforce as well.

Yes, as the employers are dealing with an aging workforce, and people are staying the workforce longer - musculoskeletal injuries often time is the one or two greatest cost health issues.

So, we've talked about why this is important to employers, and why it's important to Kentucky - it's because we know that each year, millions of American workers leave the workforce after experiencing an injury or illness, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration estimates that roughly four million non-fatal work-related injuries and illnesses take place each year, but the National Safety Council estimates that there were over 14 million non-fatal off-the-job injuries and illnesses - just in 2014 alone. And, as Shirley mentioned that some experts estimate that non-occupational injuries and illnesses take place at roughly eight times as often as occupational ones. So that makes the work of RETAIN Kentucky extremely important. Hundreds of thousands of workers go on to receive federal disability benefits and the impacts on the individuals, on the employers, and all levels of government can be truly significant and long-lasting. And, here in Kentucky, and in the Kentuckiana/Louisville region in particular - we know that healthcare practitioners and healthcare support occupations are growing at rates over 28% from 2014 and expected through 2024. And in Kentucky as a whole, of those who are Social Security Disability, 24% have a musculoskeletal or connective tissue disability. So, we know why it's important to employers, we know why this is important for Kentucky - Shirley, why is this work important to you?

Kathy, I'll share a little story with you. In my first healthcare job as a rehab nurse, I learned in my orientation to focus on employees' ability, not their disability. This has resonated throughout my career, and it's very rewarding to me to have come full circle and be able to be a part of the RETAIN Kentucky team.

And we're really glad that you are, Shirley. So now, if an employer is interested in participating or learning more, how can they contact you?

My cell phone would probably be the best way - and that is at area code (502)541-5314. My email address is shirleykron@kentuckyonehealth.org.

Thank you so much for your time, we greatly appreciate you, Shirley.

Thank you, Kathy.

We will follow this podcast with other topics that add to our understanding of retaining our workforce in Kentucky. Including, the history of Social Security Disability insurance, and advances in technology in Universal Design. We're also going to continue to talk with our other partners in RETAIN Kentucky, because we know that it takes an array of perspectives to help us help employees stay connected to their work. Our job is to retain them.

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