



Frequently Asked Questions for Professionals Guiding Your Patients Through Vocational Rehabilitation

Q Are there regulations to encourage the Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/Medicaid patient to try Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and not risk losing benefits once they get a part-time job? This is a major concern expressed by SSI/Medicaid recipients.

A People with SSI are fortunate to have a long-standing work incentive program under Section 1619 of the Social Security Act. Under Section 1619a, they get to keep their SSI check with a sliding scale reduction. Under 1619b, a person on SSI who works can keep Medicaid at a much higher income than someone who is not disabled (eliminates the need to meet share of costs). For more information, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/1619b.htm. The Red Book – A Guide to Work Incentives explains the Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS). See www.socialsecurity.gov/redbook/. The publication Understanding Supplementary Security Income/SSI Work Incentives explains that for every \$2 earned, \$1 is subtracted from the individual's SSI check. See www.socialsecurity.gov/ssi/text-work-ussi.htm.

Q Is free testing available for individuals who are not sure what they might be suited for?

A VR does an evaluation to determine the client's interests, as well as their past work history. Additional resources for determining areas of interest include:

- One Stop Workforce Boards
- Small Business Development Centers
- Choices Interest Testing (access.bridges.com)

Q How do I know who to contact for a specific patient – is it insurance dependent? What if they never graduated high school?

A VR is not dependent on a patient's insurance. End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) patients can contact VR directly. Patients with SSI and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) are presumed eligible. However, funding may affect who is served and how quickly. VR works with teens to help them transition to work. VR has helped people obtain their General Education Development (GED). In most jobs a GED is the minimal education required.

Q How can we educate workers about ESRD so they can work with patients and patients with physical disabilities?

A VR service providers often use askjan.org/index.cfm for assistance in learning more about an individual's diagnosis. Individualized information is based on self-report or doctors report. If there is information that the individual's medical team has that would be beneficial in determining limitations as well as capabilities, please share that with VR counselors upon referral.

Q How can we reduce the length of time it takes to establish a goal and a plan for work?

A Some state VR services have an Order of Selection. Once eligibility is determined, VR service providers assess the severity of one's disability and are responsible for outlining the areas of employment that are effected by disability. Individuals with the most significant disabilities are served without being placed in delayed status. Once they are taken off of the waiting list, VR is required to develop an individualized plan for employment (IPE) with an individual within 90 - 120 days, according to state guidelines. Patients also have the option to utilize other avenues, such as One-Stop Workforce Boards and Choices programs.

Q Please describe the types of dialysis patients that the VR offices are willing to assist toward employment.

A Typically it is someone who: has an idea what he/she wants to do, appears to be motivated to follow through on appointments, and is willing to make progress toward self-support. Keep in mind that a physician has to release applicants to work.

Q What services does VR provide?

A VR offers many services. Plans are individualized for each client, but can include items such as occupational licenses, transportation, etc.

Q How do I enroll my patients? How do I get them to VR for training, etc.?

A Each district office has a method for scheduling interested individuals. Some offices do group orientations; others schedule individual meetings with VR counselors. It is best that the client be proactive. Encourage your patients to take some initiative, and contact the VR office directly. It is important that the patient is clear in presenting what they want out of VR services.

Q Some VR workers seem to perceive dialysis patients as poor candidates for services, because they have to attend treatments three times per week, which may disrupt their future employment. What can we do to better educate our local office workers?

A The social worker can build a relationship with local VR Counselors and meet face-to-face, either in the VR office or at the dialysis unit. Some dialysis facilities have hosted "VR Days" – by inviting local VR Area Supervisors and Social Security Work Incentive Coordinators to visit with patients at the facility and answer questions about work and Social Security benefits.

Q If a patient wants to be trained or receive education, but has childcare needs, is there a program to assist with this expense?

A VR counselors can assist with this process. For assistance, there are Welfare Transition programs that have a variety of services, including payment for education, childcare, etc. The program is for individuals earning less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Q What kind of training can VR assist with? Does VR pay tuition? Can VR assist with purchasing equipment?

A It all depends on the individual, and the development and agreement of the vocational goal. VR does pay tuition, but requires the client to find comparable benefits that can help pay first. Clients are required to apply for the Federal Pell Grant. If they are eligible, then VR requires that this defray the tuition cost before VR pays for it. If there is money left over from the grant, it may be used for books and supplies. If VR does pay tuition, the school has to be a certified vendor. VR can assist with access to computer training, local technical schools, computers, and well as adaptive equipment.

Q Where is the best place to refer patients?

A Any of the following organizations can assist patients with their goals for rehabilitation:

- Your State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Social Security's Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Organizations
<https://choosework.ssa.gov/findhelp/>
- Maximus - www.yourtickettowork.com or call (866-968-7842)

Q What help is available for patients who have mental health concerns?

A If needed, mental health restoration services can be accessed through VR. Social workers may need to assist with advocacy, and the patient's individualized care plan should reflect coordination of care.

Q What if a patient's goal is to be self-employed?

A Self-employment is an option that can be explored with the VR counselor, or through the Small Business Development Center

Q I recently referred a patient to VR, and the patient has not heard back from them. What action should I take?

A VR has 3 business days to contact applicants, from the time a referral is received via fax. Ask your patient to contact the VR office directly.

For more information or to file a grievance, please contact:

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