

CHAPTER SIX

6. Public and private rehabilitation counseling practice

6.1. Private sector

In the 1970s, private sector rehabilitation services were developed to close the service gap between persons with less severe disabilities and severe disabilities (Grubbs, Cassell & Mulkey, 2006). The rehabilitation counselor's purpose was to help save employers' money and time while resolving a Workers Compensation claim. There was a need to provide disability management to injured workers for them to return to work quicker.

Employers and insurance companies needed a way to cut the cost of compensation during the rehabilitation process. Furthermore, when clients were provided services in public sector rehabilitation, they were being provided long term training programs, which caused insurance companies to have to compensate clients until they completed training programs. Therefore, the purpose of many private sector rehabilitation counselors was to help the injured person receive services and return to work.

Private sector rehabilitation counselors provide services that include case management, forensic evaluations and testimony, life care planning, and disability management. Private sector rehabilitation counselors work in case management in various settings such as major business corporations, health insurance companies, and attorneys' offices. Rehabilitation counselors who work within forensics help provide expert testimony in litigation regarding workers' compensation or personal injury cases. Providing expert testimony requires private sector rehabilitation counselors to have knowledge of the law. Those who provide disability management services work with injured workers to help them throughout their recovery. They facilitate treatment to help with the return to work process and to reduce the length of time an individual is off work.

Rehabilitation counselors provide life care planning services. They assist clients to develop an organized plan that describes the needs of the individual currently and in the future, which includes the financial cost and needs of the injured worker. According to Robinson (2014), life care planning is one of the newest specialties available to rehabilitation counselors.

Individuals who experience catastrophic injuries or have long term chronic health problems require lifetime medical and rehabilitation needs that are outlined within a life care plan. Life care planning allows worker's compensation attorneys, hearing officers, and judges to understand the long-term financial cost of assisting injured workers.

According to Zanskas and Strohmer (2011), there has been an increase in rehabilitation counselors working as forensic or vocational experts.

These rehabilitation counselors provide services in medical settings, transition programs, disability management, and organizations. In the 1990s, private practice rehabilitation counselors began developing more training programs not related to disability. Counselors within private practice had to have a general understanding of business and employer practices, organizational development, insurance rehabilitation, program evaluation, and benefits systems. Private rehabilitation counselors sometimes contract with federal government agencies to provide their knowledge of disability to determine whether individuals are capable of going to work.

6.2. Public sector

Public sector rehabilitation services, also known as vocational rehabilitation services, provide various services to clients who are determined eligible based on a program's eligibility requirements. Public sector rehabilitation counselors work with clients with disabilities through both state and federal levels. Federal Vocational Rehabilitation programs within the Veterans Administration work only with disabled veterans. Federal-state rehabilitation counselors work with all persons with disabilities, including veterans. Zanskas and Strohmer (2011) reported that 26–30% of all master's degree rehabilitation counselors obtain employment in federal-state vocational rehabilitation programs. Public sector rehabilitation counselors assist clients to minimize their barriers to employment and maximize their opportunities. Barriers to employment are decreased through services that address psychological, vocational, social and behavioral issues (O'Sullivan & Bates, 2014). Additionally, services include, but are not limited to, psychological and vocational assessments, individual and group counseling, training, job placement, and assistive technology.

Public sector rehabilitation counselors are known to work with more severe disabilities and clients. With the assistance of rehabilitation services, persons with disabilities have entered and remained in the labor market. According to Stapleton, Honeycutt, and Schechter (2010), state vocational rehabilitation programs are the largest provider of vocational services assisting persons with disabilities gain and maintain employment. Vocational rehabilitation services have a vital role in assisting persons with disabilities obtain and maintain competitive employment.

Competitive employment means the individual can compete with persons who are non-disabled with or without accommodations. Through public sector rehabilitation services, persons who cope with cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury, cancer, multiple sclerosis, and psychiatric disabilities have experienced positive employment outcomes (Austin & Lee, 2014). Likewise, employment helps persons with disabilities have greater economic well-being, improved emotional and physical well-being, and greater self-sufficiency (Gruman et al., 2014).

6.2.1. Public Sector Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Vocational rehabilitation service is a joint federal state funded program governed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA; Stapleton et al., 2010). Vocational rehabilitation agencies are funded through RSA and through state-matched funds. The Federal-State Vocational Rehabilitation program authorized under the Rehabilitation Act empowers people with disabilities to maximize employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, inclusion and integration into society (Parker & Szymanski, 1998). RSA was established for improving program management and effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services. RSA evaluates all programs authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its subsequent amendments (RSA, 2014).