The majority of people with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) are working age at the time of diagnosis, with the average age of onset being late 20s to mid-30s. Employment is an important part of life. It can improve your quality of life, standard of living and provide greater feelings of self-worth and social inclusion. This article highlights information to assist you in the workplace when diagnosed, or if MS affects your ability to do your job.

**Be Prepared!**

The first point is simply to be prepared. Do not make decisions at a time of crisis or distress.

Equip yourself with:

- information about your workplace rights and responsibilities
- what support is available to you
- the terms and conditions of your employment contract
- your superannuation entitlements and
- any insurance cover you may hold

This information helps you make informed decisions.

**Disclosure – Who do I tell and when?**

The most common question people with MS ask is whether they should disclose their diagnosis of MS to their employer. Disclosure, the when and who to tell of your diagnosis, will depend upon a range of factors including:

- the nature of your position
- your workplace culture and industry
- your employment contract and
- your relationship with your employer –particularly your immediate manager
- how MS affects you individually and
- your ability to meet the inherent requirements of the position

Some people choose not to disclose in the workplace, as they are living well with MS. Others decide to wait and see how MS affects them and their position over time. Some feel it is important to disclose upon diagnosis. It is best to consider the options, as there are advantages and disadvantages for both disclosing and not disclosing.
Legal obligations

You are generally not legally bound to disclose you have MS. However, there are exceptions to this rule:

- If you experience symptoms from MS that would place you or others at risk in the workplace, you have an obligation or duty of care to inform your employer. As an example, a person who experiences vertigo who works using ladders or trestles would have a duty to disclose their condition to the employer.
- When a potential employer asks a direct question about your medical history or whether you have any condition that could affect your ability to do the job for which you are employed. Not disclosing you have MS could be perceived as untruthful. It has the potential impact of decreasing trust between you and your employer.

Disclosing to your employer can be helpful as it explains health issues that may arise over time. It also helps your employer work with you. Together you can manage issues that may arise – e.g. need for leave.

Many employers feel a sense of disappointment and mistrust when they are not informed about your diagnosis and hear about it at a later stage. They can make assumptions, which may be incorrect.

How you approach the subject of disclosure is important. Start from the premise that very few people understand MS and therefore they often associate MS with disability. BE PREPARED for this meeting and consider what information, support and resources may be useful to assist you to approach this conversation.

An important outcome is to gain your employers support and increase their understanding of MS and how it directly affects you. MS Queensland can be of assistance in helping you prepare for a meeting where you are talking about MS.

Australian and Queensland laws offer you some protection in the workplace. By law, an employer cannot discriminate against a person with a disability or chronic health condition. This is unjust and unlawful and is called discrimination. This can take many forms – for e.g. not recommending you for higher-level duties because they think you will be unable to manage the role.
Reasonable adjustments

An employer is bound by law to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to accommodate a disability or chronic condition. What is considered a ‘reasonable adjustment’ varies depending on your workplace and the role in which you are employed.

This may involve:

- flexible work arrangements or hours
- work from home
- scheduled rest breaks to assist with fatigue
- a designated car park
- equipment and aids to assist you
- Workplace modifications may also help, and may come at little or no cost to the employer through government-funded programs.

MS Queensland is committed to assisting you to gain the best outcomes in your workplace. We have:

- experienced staff who can help with employment related matters
- information and resources
- We host workshops and webinars on Employment and MS.
- Information on employment is provided on our website along with information about any education sessions.

Alternatively, phone our InfoLine on 1800 177591 for more information.

Recent research suggests that early intervention in the workplace has the greatest long-term benefits for people living with MS. Be informed, be prepared and utilise the help available as needed.
Other useful contacts

- 1800 464 800
- Advice re Superannuation, Insurance, employment rights and entitlements ---
  - Disability Advice Line – Maurice Blackburn Lawyers Free call 1800 196 050
  - Legal Aid Queensland --- 32383500
- The Fair Work Ombudsman provides information for workers about wages, working conditions, awards, trading hours, holiday entitlements and the obligations of your employer. http://www.fairwork.gov.au You can phone the Fair Work on 13 13 94 for advice about your rights at work.
- Australian Taxation Office Superannuation Helpline: 13 1020

Other related topics


Assessing fitness to drive for commercial and private vehicle drivers – medical standards for licensing and clinical management guidelines 2016. see neurological conditions – Multiple Sclerosis for guidelines for when diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.
Useful References and Links


MSIF – Survey on employment and MS http://www.msif.org/living-with-ms/telling-people-you-have-ms-2/