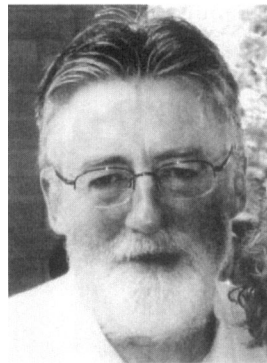
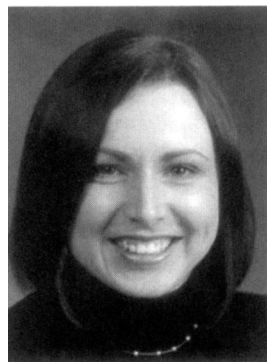

EDITORIAL

The vocational implications of the suffering of a serious injury or of having to live many years with a chronic ill-health condition are matters that need to be better understood by a range of human-service professionals, including those involved in careers counselling. Advances in medical science, and improvements in the efficiency of emergency service personnel, mean that, today, many people are surviving to old age even though they may have suffered a life-threatening injury or been diagnosed with a previously fatal disease. If serious ill health or injury occurs at a relatively young age, then the effectiveness of the rehabilitation services provided will have a major impact on the quality of life of those affected, as well as on the costs to be borne by the community in terms of loss of productivity and increased use of medical and related services.

The undertaking of a work role is recognised as generally correlated with improved mental and physical health. Yet, in spite of the evidence for the health benefits of employment, there is still unevenness in the extent to which health and human-service professionals are knowledgeable about, or pay attention to, the vocational implications of their clients' injuries and disabilities. National surveys conducted in both Australia and overseas have found that only a minority of people who have a disability



are in the labour force. Louis Harris & Associates (1996) found that approximately only one-third of persons with disabilities in the United States are members of the workforce. Of the remainder, 79% said that they could and would like to work. In Australia, only 53% of people with a disability are members of the labour force (Australian Council of Social Services, 2000). Such findings identify an opportunity to improve the health and well-being of those with a disability through assisting them to achieve their vocational potential.

In North America, there is a specific profession (Rehabilitation Counselling) dedicated to providing the services required to 'return the person with a disability to the fullest physical, mental, social, vocational and economic usefulness of which they are capable' (see National Council on Rehabilitation, 1944). In Australia, there are a variety of health and related professionals who undertake some or all of this task. For example, doctors and physiotherapists will concentrate on 'medical and physical rehabilitation services', occupational therapists on 'independent living services' and psychologists and social workers on 'psychosocial rehabilitation services'. Regardless of the main focus of a particular professional group's services, a central question that must be asked is 'how do the services provided assist the client to better

undertake the work role?'. Further, we must ask 'how best can we support the vocational aspirations of persons affected by ill-health or injury?'.

At the same time as we are learning about the general health benefits of the undertaking of paid work and of the many unpredicted post-injury vocational achievements of those with even the most serious of injuries, we are faced with a labour market characterised by features that make it increasingly difficult for all in our society to plan a career that involves sustained employment in predictable positions. Thus the increased importance of effective vocational counselling, guided by up-to-date knowledge about ways to maximally realise vocational potential is evident. This Special Issue of the *AJCD* provides an opportunity for careers professionals to better understand the vocational potential of those undergoing rehabilitation, and for health professionals to understand that 'rehabilitation' and 'vocational rehabilitation' are virtually synonymous terms.

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