Maxine Mesinger Sclerosis Clinic

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International Coor dinator: Cristina M. Rivera

Clinical Social Worker: Tracey L. Reeves, LCSW, MSCS

Receptionist: Angie Covalt

Clinical Tech: Viola Rarb

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Financial Specialist: Nedra Edwards

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Employment Issue: What is your vocation?

By Tracey L. Reeves, LCSW, MSCS

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New Webster's Dictionary defines vocation as: a 🌇 calling; profession; employment; business.

What is it that you were called to do? Most persons associate the word vocation with "employment." Although employment can be a person's vocation, what if a person does not work? Many persons in our society do not participate in traditional employment activities for a variety of reasons and not all of them because of a disability.

When living with a chronic disease such as multiple sclerosis, it is important to identify activities that are positive and fulfilling. For many persons, employment can be a rewarding experience. Whether you are newly diagnosed or have been diagnosed for sometime, it is

important to give some thought to the or ongoing medical problems. And role that employment plays in your life. Do you enjoy your job? Do you find it challenging and rewarding? What is your working environment like? Do you frequently work long hours? Are your work relationships positive? How dependent are you on the income and benefits you receive?

Before making changes in the workplace, it is crucial to differentiate between the stresses of work, personal stressors and the stresses related to a medical condition. Some individuals discover that their work is not satisfying or causing them unmanage- their illness. able amount of stress and decide to consider a change of employment. Still others may realize that their ability to handle stress overall is compromised and might seek counseling to work on developing additional coping strategies. Some may require workplace accommodations or a temporary leave from work because of new

finally, still others may have to discontinue work entirely.

Persons who become disabled may have the greatest challenge to face as they must adjust to reduced income, insurance concerns and rediscovering their vocation. Although work related stressors are now absent, they have been replaced by the stress associated with the loss of a daily routine and purpose. Usually most persons find that the longer they are able to stay in the workforce, the better they are able to cope with the demands of

If this is not possible for you, there may be other appropriate activities for you that do not jeopardize your disability status or health but are just as stimulating and rewarding as employment. Many persons have used their experience with multiple sclerosis to educate others (continued on page 2)

Meet The Staff: Front office staff



Angie Covalt

You may have noticed the absence in December of one of the more familiar faces here at the clinic, Angie Covalt. Angie has worked with the physicians, staff

and patients of the Maxine Mesinger Clinic for 9 years as a receptionist and always brightened our days with her laughter. Angle and her family will be relocating soon to the Dallas area and we wish them all the best. We thank her for her years of service and we will miss her.



Viola Barb

Viola is a Clinical Technician and experienced phlebotomist at the clinic and has worked for the BCM Neurology department for a year. She received her first training/ certification in 1995 as a nursing

assistant/phlebotomist at UTMB Galveston and during the past 11 years. Viola has worked at a number of hospitals in The Medical Center including MD Anderson, the VA and Methodist. (continued on page 2)

What is your vocation? (Continued from page 1)

or find meaning volunteering with their favorite organization or charity. Still others, because of permanent disability, have used it as an opportunity to deepen their relationships with immediate family members. It is important to remember, that just because you no longer go into the workplace each day, you still have vocational and socialization needs. Alternatively, just because you are no longer employed outside the home, it does not necessarily mean you can assume more chores or responsibilities on the home front! It can be tempting for individuals and families to assume that the person no longer working can take on more responsibilities at home but remember, the

disabilities that interfered with regular work will most likely interfere with regular activities at home too. It is crucial to keep this in mind for persons whose job consists of running the household and parenting children fulltime.

For persons who are still able to work and/or want to continue working, there are a few options to maintain employment. Utilize company leave policies and FMLA if necessary and/or discuss possible workplace accommodations with your treatment team. It is a good idea to seek guidance before negotiating with your employer.

If you find yourself constantly "stressed out" or sad and unhappy, it may be time to talk to someone about your particular situation. Mood changes are a normal and expected part of living with a chronic condition like multiple sclerosis. Sometimes our usual defenses become overwhelmed or we never developed positive strategies for coping with stress. Whatever the reason, you don't have to suffer alone. Please let someone know if you are feeling anxious, hopeless or sad on a daily basis and remain open to recommendations from your health care team.

So...what's your calling?

Meet The Staff (Continued from page 1)

She enjoys caring for people and making them smile and hopes to continue helping others by obtaining her nursing degree. When not working with "the great group of people at the clinic where I learn new things every day," Viola enjoys spending time with her family and outdoor activities. Please join us in welcoming Viola!



Nedra is the Financial Specialist for the clinic. She assists patients

checking into and out of the clinic, verifies insurance and also schedules patients for appointments and tests. She studied Business Administration at Houston Community College and transitioned into the medical community where she has worked the last 5 years. She joined the clinic

Nedra Edwards almost two years ago and adds that she has enjoyed every moment.

> Nedra adds that it is a much different and more rewarding experience than the one she had working in Internal Medicine. "Just working with people who have MS and seeing what they go through has changed my life. I feel like I have really gotten close to all of our patients." Nedra views her work here at the clinic as a journey and is excited about where this path with take her.

Employment Resources

The Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)has a variety of programs available to assist persons who are having difficulty maintaining employment or independence due to a disability or illness. The following are DARS programs:

Vocation Rehabilitation Services: helps persons prepare for, find or keep employment Independent Living Services: helps the non-working disabled live as independently as possi-

Independent Living Program for DARS has provided counseling, the Visually Impaired: helps blind or visually impaired individuals gain independence

Services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, & Communication **Disorders:** helps those with hearing disorders join the workforce

School Transition Program:

helps young persons with disabilities define goals and achieve employment

evaluation and testing, rehabilitation, adaptive aids, vehicle modification and job training for many of our patients. If you are interested in any of these programs, please call Region IV at 1-866-281-1804 or 713-735-3470 for an appointment.

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American Disabilities Act (ADA) and MS

The ADA protects persons with MS from disabilities in the workplace and includes some important provisions:

- An employee must be able to perform essential functions of the job but nonessential tasks can be given to others.
- An employee can request reasonable accommodations to help them perform the job (but the employee is responsible for investi-

gating and proposing these accommodations.)

An employee is not required to disclose a medical diagnosis (although it may be necessary in order to request an accommodation.)

It is important to obtain guidance before making any changes in the workplace. The National MS Society has some excellent written guides addressing these issues: Should I Work?

ADA and People with MS

The Win-Win Approach to Reasonable Accommodations

Information for Employers

These guides are available from our social worker, Tracey L. Reeves, LCSW who can meet with you to discuss your particular situation. Please let the receptionist know if you would like to speak with her or call 713/798-4470.

FYI:

Research has shown that the primary factor in a person's ability to cope with a chronic condition is the quality of the support available to that person.

Health & Wellness

Abilities Expo-Texas

The Abilities Expo originally scheduled to take place in Houston in early December 2006 and advertised in the last issue of MS Messenger was cancelled and will now be held in San Antonio, Texas at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, January 26-28, 2007. Our apologies for any inconvenience to you.



COOLING DEVICES

Now is the best time to begin plan-

ning for the next hot and muggy Houston summer. If you can't afford to purchase a cooling garment, consider applying to the Multiple Sclerosis Association of America (MSAA) online or by calling 1-800-5327667. The completed application must include a prescription from your physician noting a MS diagnosis. Through the program, you will be able to choose one "cooling kit" which typically includes a vest, neck wrap and wrist wraps. The application also includes a catalogue of garments & manufacturers to help you with your decision.

A Tribute to Kenneth Cameron



Kenneth Cameron died suddenly on September 13, 2006.

Kenny was remembered for his determination, sense of hu-

mor, faith and positive attitude

which enabled him to cope with the day to day stresses of living with multiple sclerosis. He truly mastered the art of living and remained involved in numerous vocations and interests.

Kenny was a patient at The Maxine Mesinger MS Clinic and we received many kind donations from family, friends and associates which have been placed in a special fund. Plans are underway to make this fund permanent and we have asked his family to help determine how the funds are to be used.

We thank everyone who donated and ask you to keep Kenny's memory as well as his family and friends in your hearts and minds.



Maxine Mesinger Multiple Scierosis Clinic

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Comments or suggestions? Contact Tracey L. Reeves @ 713/798-4470.

"Making life livable for persons with MS."

National MS Society Corner

Special Needs Trust Seminar

Presentation by Pi-Yi Mayo who is an attorney specializing in elder law, special needs trust and Social Security and Medicare law.

Saturday, January 13, 2007

9:30-11:30 am

National MS Society

8111 N. Stadium Dr, Ste 100, Houston TX 77054

RSVP by January 11th by calling 1-800-344-4867 (press 1.)

NMSS Scholarship

Do you know someone who is a high school senior or high school graduate who has MS or who has a parent with MS and is planning on attending college for the first time? If so, they may be eligible for a NMSS scholarship. The application deadline is January 15, 2007. Applications can be found online at www.nationalmssociety.org.

NMSS Annual Valentine's Social

in Houston is scheduled for February 24th, 2007 from 11:00am-2:00pm at the Marriott Westchase, 2900 Briarpark.

Get Involved

Consider contributing your time and talents to the NMSS as a volunteer or advocate. Contact the NMSS for more information at 1-800-FIGHT-MS (1-800-344-4867) and get involved.

2nd Annual Women Against MS (WAMS) Luncheon

This year's luncheon will be held at the Rice Hotel on Thursday, February 15, 2007. Zoe Koplowitz, author and marathoner is the featured guest speaker. To purchase tickets or a table, contact Taylor Darnell at 713-526-8967 (press 2.)