

Going Back to Work after Transplant: How Can Your Medical Team Support You?

Celebrating a Second Chance at Life Survivorship Symposium

April 29 – May 5, 2023



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Learning Objectives

- Understand how common return-to-work (RTW) struggles are following stem cell transplant.
- Appreciate the research efforts that have been put toward educating the transplant community on RTW barriers and supports.
- Become familiar with the newly approved RTW guidance and RTW planning tool.
- Gain confidence that you can work with your medical team and your employer to get the assistance you need to be successful at work.

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Patients I've Seen in the Last Year...

Pre-transplant consult

An occupational therapy student who is in the middle of her second year of school.

Day 100 discharge visit

A painter who feels the exposure caused his cancer and wants to retrain in Technology.

1-year follow-up visit

An electrician with neuropathy who is afraid to get on a ladder.

3-year GVHD visit

A government contractor who has been out of work twice due to Lung GVHD and now works 30 hours per week from home.

5-year GVHD visit

A traveling consultant who hasn't regained the energy to resume weekly travel.

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Outline

Background: Return to Work (RTW) Struggles are Common in Stem Cell Transplant Survivors.

Research efforts to define RTW barriers and supports

- * Transplant Center Director Survey
- * Survivor Survey

Recently published RTW Guidance and Planning Tool

- * Why it's important to include your employer

Future Directions

- * RTW support interventions (getting the assistance you need to be successful at work)

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Returning to Work after Cancer

- More than 15 million cancer survivors are alive in the US.
- 40% are of working age.
- Adults with a prior cancer diagnosis are:
 - 1.4 times more likely than people of similar age, sex, and education level to be unemployed.
 - More likely to have limitations in the amount or type of work they could do because of health problems.

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Work is One Element of Survivorship

- Survivors see employment as a measure of self-worth, competence, independence, and contribution.
- Work also provides an environment for social contacts, interactions and group affiliations.
- Return to work is a measure of recovery from treatment and return to an identity beyond “patient.”

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Large Study of Cancer Survivors

- 1,435 cancer survivors aged 25 - 62 who were working at the time of their diagnosis.
- Interviewed by phone from 1 - 5 years after diagnosis.
- Patients were asked about:
 - Employment from time of diagnosis to follow-up.
 - Work-related disability.
 - Whether disabilities or reasons for quitting work were cancer-related.

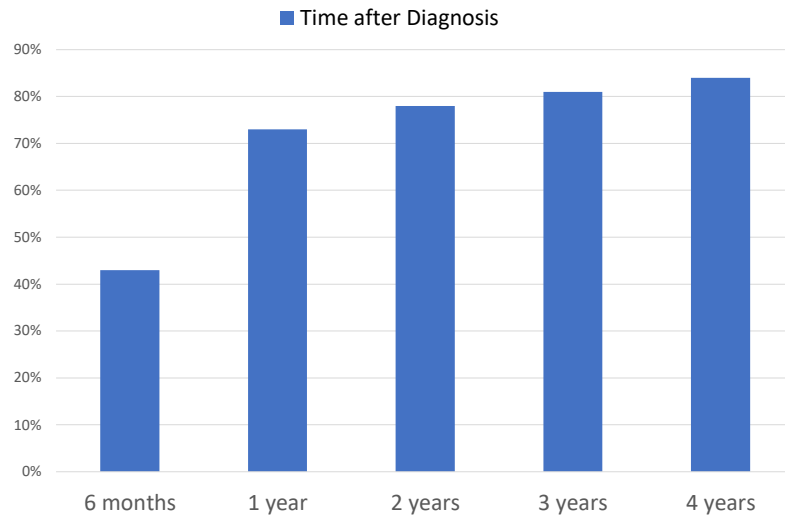
Cancer, Volume: 103, Issue: 6, Pages: 1292-1301,
First published: 07 February 2005



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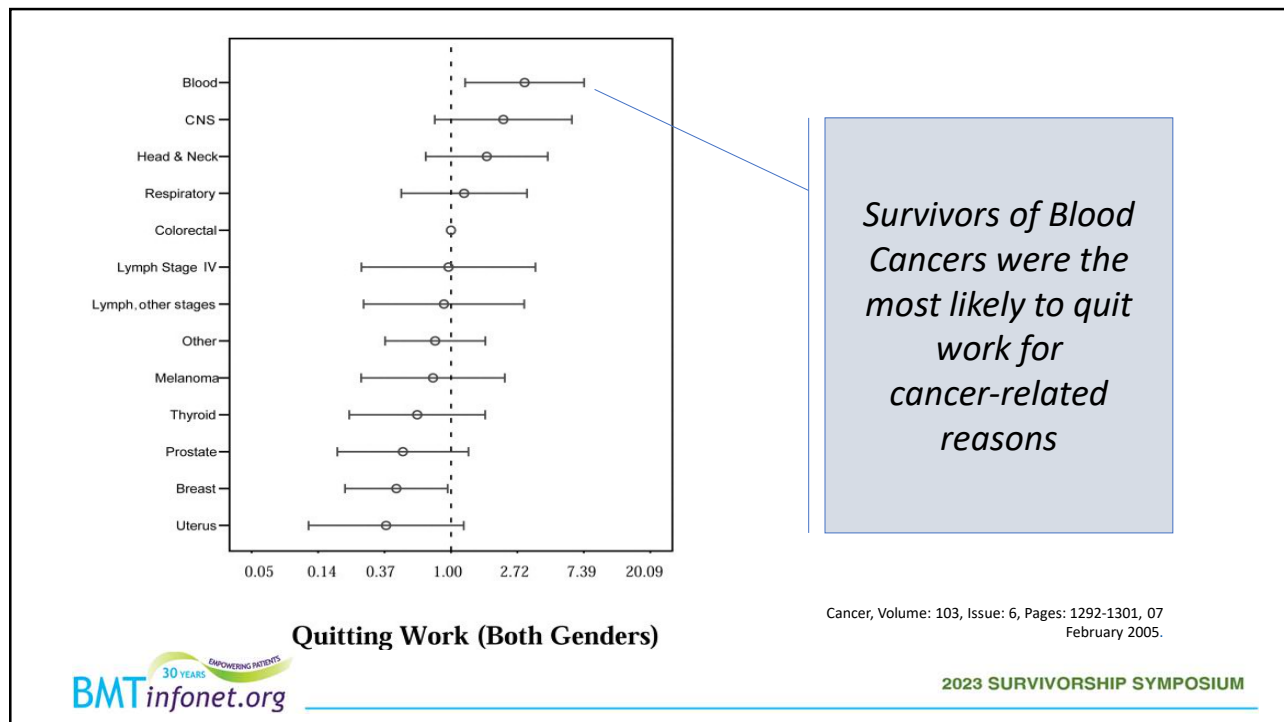
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Patients Who RTW Within 4 Years After Diagnosis



Cancer, Volume: 103, Issue: 6, Pages: 1292-1301, 07 February 2005,
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Why are Patients with Blood Cancers at Higher Risk?

- Prolonged inpatient stays
- Recurrent hospitalizations due to infections
- Stem cell transplant
 - Lengthy courses of immune suppression drugs
 - Prolonged courses of graft-versus-host disease
 - Long periods of time out of work and/or on disability

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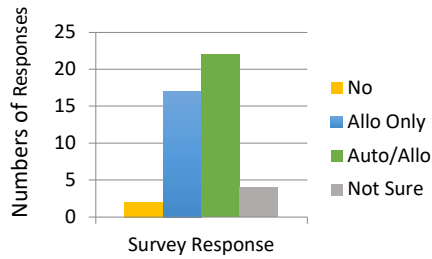
Return to Work Center Director Survey

- Goals:
 - To determine whether transplant centers have guidelines for RTW post-HCT and the details of these guidelines.
 - Determine whether transplant centers have RTW support programs for their patients and what these programs entail.

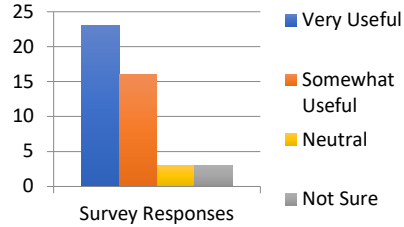
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Transplant Center Director Survey Results

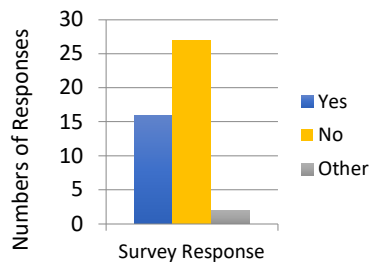
Is RTW a Problem for Post-HCT Patients?



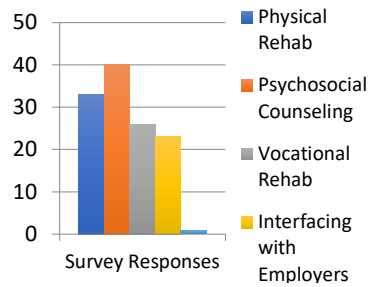
How helpful do you think a RTW program would be?



Does your Center have RTW Support?



What types of RTW support might be helpful?



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Conclusions from Transplant Director Survey

1. Guidelines and RTW support for post-HCT patients are lacking.
2. We have the potential to improve RTW success by:
 - a) Developing structured guidelines for patients, providers and employers.
 - b) Piloting RTW support programs.

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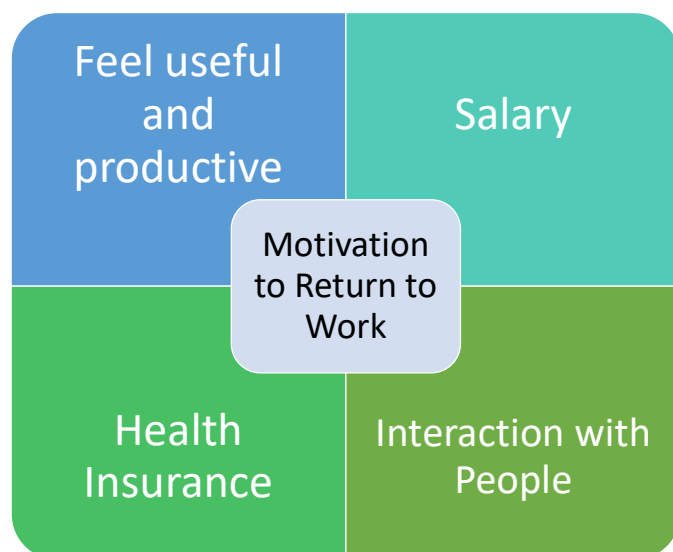
Return to Work Survivor Survey

- 1,000 1 – 5-year HCT survivors aged 18 – 64.
- Survey given to patients on their HCT anniversary.
- Survey included questions about:
 - Pre-transplant work status and environment.
 - Medical team support.
 - Employer support during and after transplant.
 - Suggestions for support interventions.

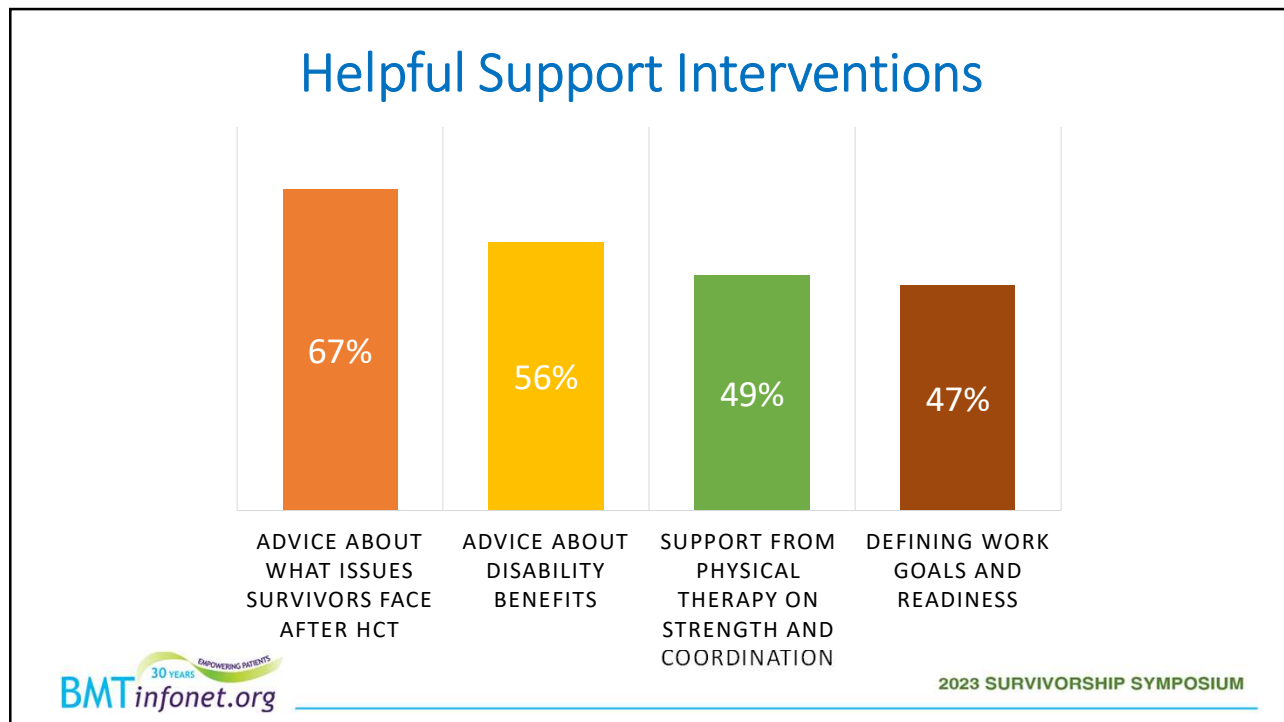
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Results

- At 3 years post-transplant, 51% of survivors were working part- or full-time.
- Of survivors currently working, 53% had changed to a flexible work schedule or location or both.
- At least monthly communication with their employer was associated with greater likelihood of successful RTW.



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Interview Study in Dutch Transplant Patients

- 15 Dutch HCT patients treated 1–5 years ago participated in face-to-face interviews.
- Perceived barriers included:
 - The duration and side effects of cancer treatment
 - The presence of poor health before diagnosis
 - Having difficulties commuting and doing household tasks
- Perceived facilitators were:
 - Financial incentives
 - Keeping in touch with the workplace
 - Support of other patients and family
 - Looking after one's health

Persoon S. et al 2018 (Netherlands)

BMT 30 YEARS EMPOWERING PATIENTS infonet.org 2023 SURVIVORSHIP SYMPOSIUM

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Interviews as Part of a Blood Cancer Survivorship Study

- Interviews were conducted with 50 Australians 1-year post-treatment for a blood cancer
- Interviews identified a distinct group who wanted to RTW but had problems.
- Barriers included:
 - Ongoing physical complaints including GVHD
 - Fatigue
 - Sun-sensitivity
 - Inability to do physical work
 - Loss of self-confidence and competence

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Transplant Survivors Need Guidance from Health Professionals

- Patients need assistance:
 - Defining work goals.
 - Determining work readiness.
 - Referrals to work supports
 - Accommodations throughout the recovery process

Returning to Work...



Zamanzadeh V et al Psychooncology 2018

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American Society for Transplantation and Cellular Therapy (ASTCT) RTW Guidance Committee

- Members
 - BMT Physicians, Social Worker, Occupational and Physical therapists, Infectious Disease Physician, Psychologist.
- Methods
 - Literature review combined with individual expert opinion.

RTW Guidance Committee Recommendations

• Pre-transplant

Define Work Goals
Understand Disability Benefits
Obtain Financial Assistance
Optimize Physical Fitness

• During transplant

Maintain Physical, Cognitive and Psychosocial Fitness
Employer/Employee Communication

• Resources provided

ADA: www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/ada18.cfm
FMLA: www.dol.gov/whd/fmla/fmla-faqs.htm
Triage Cancer <https://tragecancer.org>
Cancer and Careers <https://www.cancerandcareers.org/en>

• Post-transplant

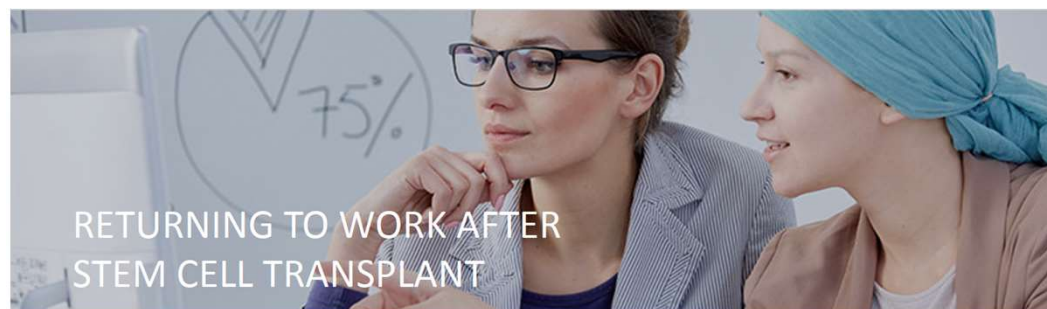
Re-evaluate Work Goals
Timing of RTW
Employee Rights
Potential Work Modifications
Importance of Provider/Employer Communication

Tools to Evaluate:

- Physical Health
- Functional Capacity
- Psychosocial Issues
- Neurocognitive Ability
- Exposure Risk

Role of OT, PT and Vocational Rehabilitation Professionals

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RETURNING TO WORK AFTER STEM CELL TRANSPLANT

Defining Work Goals Prior to Transplant:

- Are you currently working? What are your job duties?
- Is your job the main source of income for your family?
- Do you want to return to work after transplant?
- Is your employer planning to hold your job? For how long?
- What is your plan to talk with your supervisor or colleagues while you are in treatment?
- Are you worried about how your transplant, will affect your ability to work?



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Resources

Helpful Resources:

SSI Web site: <https://www.ssa.gov/redbook/eng/returning-to-work.htm>

Americans with Disabilities Act: www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/ada18.cfm

Family and Medical Leave: www.dol.gov/whd/fmla/fmla-faqs.htm

Triage Cancer: <https://tragecancer.org>

Cancer and Careers: <https://www.cancerandcareers.org/en>

Link to Guidance with Supplemental Materials:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666636722016530>

Guidance from Your Medical Team

• Re-evaluate Work Goals

- If money was not a concern, what would you want to do with your time?
- Do you want to return to the same job you had before transplant?
- Do you have concerns about being able to do the same work you did before transplant?
- What kind of assistance do you need to support your next steps in going back to work?

• Determine Optimal Timing of RTW

- Are you physically, mentally, and emotionally ready to RTW?
- What supports would you need to get there?

• Medical Team Should Communicate Directly with Employer

Evaluate for Potential Work Modifications

- The Americans with Disabilities Act says that “employers are **required** to make reasonable accommodations” to support cancer patients who are returning to work.
- These may include:
 - Time off from work for hospital stays and appointments
 - Reduced hours
 - Flexible working
 - Changing their duties
 - Working from home
 - Allowing for regular breaks
- **Employers can also offer additional accommodations that are not legally required.**

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Why It's Important to Include Your Employer

Your medical team can provide information as to risk of infections, fatigue, difficulty with concentration and memory, emotional issues, physical strength and GVHD.

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The employer can supply understanding of the job demands, the workplace culture and the supports that can be made available in the workplace.

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Work readiness determinations can focus on not only survivor readiness but also the workplace's readiness to provide a successful transition back to work.

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RTW Planning Tool-Part A → Patient/Provider

How ready are you to return to work within the next 1-3 months?	
How many hours a day do you think you could currently work?	
How many days a week do you think you could currently work?	
What work accommodations do you think you would benefit from? (check all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Paid sick time for medical appointments	<input type="checkbox"/> Working from home
<input type="checkbox"/> Reduced hours	<input type="checkbox"/> Allowed to take regular breaks
<input type="checkbox"/> Flexible schedule	<input type="checkbox"/> Change in physical workspace
<input type="checkbox"/> Change in duties	<input type="checkbox"/> Other:
What supports do you think would be helpful?	
<input type="checkbox"/> PT/OT Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/> OK to RTW Physical Evaluation by MD
<input type="checkbox"/> Psychological Counseling	<input type="checkbox"/> Disability Benefits Counseling
<input type="checkbox"/> Job Safety Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/> Other:
<input type="checkbox"/> Referrals Placed/Assessments Completed	
<input type="checkbox"/> Request for Employer to be Contacted	<input type="checkbox"/> By phone
	<input type="checkbox"/> By email/letter

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Part B - Patient/Employer Reintegration Plan

<input type="checkbox"/> Current issues impacting return to work (check all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue <input type="checkbox"/> Concentration/Mental processing <input type="checkbox"/> Depression/Anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Decrease physical strength	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequent medical appointments <input type="checkbox"/> Repeated infections <input type="checkbox"/> Immune suppression drugs <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
Start date:	
Job Description at time of return to work (include hours per day x days per week):	Initial duties to include:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •
Current medical restrictions:	

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RTW Planning Tool Part B - continued

What work accommodations is the Employer able/willing to provide?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Paid sick time for medical appointments	<input type="checkbox"/> Working from home
<input type="checkbox"/> Reduced hours	<input type="checkbox"/> Allowance of regular breaks
<input type="checkbox"/> Flexible schedule	<input type="checkbox"/> Change in physical workspace
<input type="checkbox"/> Change in duties/travel	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Communication Plan	
Supervisor	Check-ins with supervisor every ____ weeks to review this plan and to adjust as needed.
Co-workers	Meeting with co-workers before your start date to update you on items such as projects and staffing.
Disclosure	If you have a human-resources at your place of employment, be clear about what you are willing to disclose about your diagnosis and treatment to your supervisor and coworkers. Also consider how you want your supervisor to communicate your RTW to your coworkers (via email, in a team meeting?)

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Return to Work Pilot Study

1. To establish the ability of Social Workers at a transplant center to provide RTW support for patients.
 - 15 patients will be enrolled.
 - SW-led counseling about RTW and assistance completing the RTW planning tool.
2. To determine the ability to include patients' employers in a RTW support intervention
 - 15 supervisors will be approached to take part in a RTW support intervention.
 - SW-led guidance on individual patient RTW support and work accommodations.
 - Directions on how supervisor and patient can complete the employer portion of the RTW planning tool will be provided.

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Conclusions

- RTW is an issue for many post-HCT patients
- RTW Guidance specific to HCT patients has recently been published with Open Access and is usable by HCT survivors and their medical teams
- **What can you do now if you would like to RTW?**
 - Talk to your provider about your readiness to go back to work
 - Talk to your employer about work flexibility
 - Use the RTW planning tool to design a RTW plan for realistic expectations
 - Ask for referrals to psychology, physical therapy, or vocational rehab if you don't think you're getting enough support

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QUESTIONS?



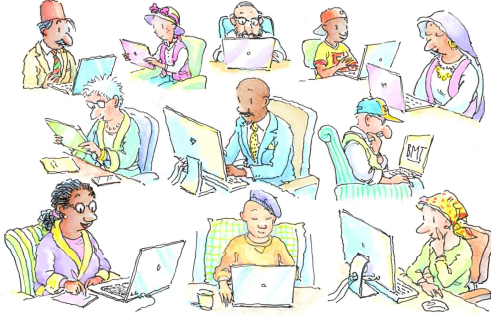
Rachel Salit, MD
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LET US KNOW HOW WE CAN HELP YOU



Visit our website: bmtinfonet.org

Email us: help@bmtinfonet.org

Phone: 888-597-7674 or 847-433-3313