



Tuesday, February 29, 2000

OU department sets example for employers

A department at Oakland University is setting a good example in accommodating an employee disabled by a repetitive strain injury (RSI). The workplace accommodation is especially important as citizens in the United States and Canada prepare to join at least 12 nations to mark the first annual International RSI Awareness Day on Feb. 29. RSIs are one of the world's serious and growing occupational health problems.

RSI is an umbrella term for many overuse injuries affecting the soft tissues (muscles, tendons, and nerves) of the neck, upper and lower back, chest, shoulders, arms and hands. The injuries stem from many factors, including repetitive movements, force, and awkward or static postures. Typically arising as numbness and aches, these injuries can progress to become crippling disorders that prevent sufferers from working or leading normal lives.

The awareness day was organized by a group of injured workers, trade unionists, health and safety professionals, health care practitioners, and others who share a goal to increase awareness of these crippling injuries; to prevent others from being injured; and to improve the situation for those who are already injured.

Oakland University's Communications and Marketing Department has accommodated a staff writer and editor whose RSI prevents her from working on a standard computer keyboard for periods. Jennifer Charney works at home with a unique combination of equipment that she researched and modified after developing tendinitis in her arms. Her RSI stemmed from working on a standard computer keyboard in her former job as newspaper editor. She has had the now-chronic injury since 1990. A special keyboard, foot pedals and dictation software allow Charney to write and edit on her computer using her voice, feet and hands. "It took time for me to get used to the equipment," she says. "It saved my career."

Charney, of Ferndale, has written and edited many university publications from home since 1996. She also freelances as a writer and editor.

"The arrangement has been very productive for the department and for Jennifer," says Geoff Upward, director, Communications and Marketing.

Accommodating workers with RSIs to return them to health and productivity is an important step in coping with this health problem to which no one is immune, says Catherine Fenech, the Canadian RSI sufferer who launched the RSI Day campaign on the Internet. Fenech is the coordinator of RSI Day.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics notes that repetitive trauma disorders (not including back injuries) accounted for 62 percent (308,000) of all reported work-related illness cases in 1995, and had increased fourteenfold from 1972 to 1994.

"Despite their increasing prevalence, these injuries are poorly understood by workers, employers and the medical profession," Fenech says. "Getting appropriate diagnosis, treatment, compensation, and workplace accommodation is often difficult and places a further burden on the injured worker."

Raising awareness through public education is a vital step toward protecting workers from RSIs, Fenech says.

With its network of international planning groups and volunteers, the International RSI Awareness Day Planning Committee pursues its mission by: Raising awareness through public education is a vital step toward protecting workers from RSIs, Fenech says.

With its network of international planning groups and volunteers, the International RSI Awareness Day Planning Committee pursues its mission by:

- Educating the public about the types of RSIs, the risk factors, and how best to prevent, detect, accommodate, and treat RSIs.
- Stimulating research to improve prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of RSIs.
- Encouraging participation by workers, employers, unions, health care professionals, ergonomists, lawmakers and all other parties concerned, to help find solutions to RSIs.

NOTE TO MEDIA: The general contact in the U.S. is Scott Wright, CTD Resource Network, Inc., Los Banos, CA, Voice/Fax: (209) 827-0801, scott@ctdrn.org <http://www.ctdrn.org>

YOU MAY ALSO CONTACT:

Jennifer Charney, (248) 545-2161 JenCharney@aol.com

Catherine Fenech, coordinator, International RSI Awareness Day (416) 622-1561 of RSIs, the risk factors, and how best to prevent, detect, accommodate, and treat RSIs. Stimulating research to improve prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of RSIs. Encouraging participation by workers, employers, unions, health care professionals, ergonomists, lawmakers and all other parties concerned, to help find solutions to RSIs.

RSI prevention—Take frequent breaks. Minimize exposure to repetitive movements, force, and awkward or static postures. Stretch. Vary your tasks to use different muscles.—Keep active. Remember, people were not meant to sit all day.—Design workstations and work to fit workers instead of expecting workers to fit the work.—Redesign jobs to eliminate/minimize harmful motions or postures and to allow for a variety of tasks.—See a doctor at the first sign of discomfort.

SUMMARY

A department at Oakland University is setting a good example in accomodating an employee disabled by a repetitive strain injury.

Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, February 29, 2000
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, February 29, 2000
Article Start Date: Friday, January 16, 2004