Unum’s Vocational Rehabilitation in Practice

Case Study
Chris Burley

Unum’s Approach
A prompt return to work after recovery was not feasible and Chris was on long-term sickness leave for several months. Fortunately his company had taken out a Group Income Protection scheme with Unum which meant that Chris’s salary continued to be paid, easing him of any financial worries. An added value benefit of the scheme was that Chris could make full use of the company’s in-house Rehabilitation Services team. He was assigned his own Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant (VRC), who worked closely with Chris to assist him on his road to recovery. Chris’s VRC was able to help educate him on his condition and make him aware of any limitations he might encounter. She looked carefully at what his job entailed, whereabouts he was in the recovery phase and the expectations of his employer, so that she could make recommendations of any necessary adjustments to his routine or working environment.

“No company should be without a Group Income Protection scheme.”

Chris Burley

Chris was working as a Financial Director of a leading supplier of process-automation products. His job carried a lot of responsibility and required him to travel frequently to the company’s European offices.

So, when he unexpectedly lost the use of his legs, he couldn’t begin to imagine how vital Unum’s in-house Rehabilitation Services team would be on his road to recovery.

The Case
Chris had begun to feel increasingly unwell. Climbing stairs became a real struggle and he felt like he was losing all power in his legs. Just two months later, Chris had lost the use of his legs completely. Paralysed from the mid-chest down, Chris was immediately admitted to hospital and given drugs to stabilise his condition. It was there that the doctors diagnosed Guillain-Barre Syndrome, an acute disease of the peripheral nerves causing progressive muscle weakness and frequently paralysis. The disease is rare, affecting just 1 or 2 individuals per 100,000 and awareness amongst GPs and specialists is still quite low.
Achievement against the Odds

Chris’s VRC liaised closely with his employer and GP to establish a Graduated Return to Work plan, ensuring that it was at the right pace for Chris’s recovery. During this return to work phase, and as he gradually built up his hours and his condition improved, he was eased of any financial worries as he continued to receive proportionate benefit from Unum in addition to his adjusted salary. Chris has amazed everyone by now being back at work full-time. He admits he still has his ‘wobbly’ days and feels about 85% recovered, but through the coping strategies suggested by his VRC he now knows when to take things easy and to not push himself too hard. Chris’s VRC also looked at his work-life balance and made constructive suggestions as to how to improve this. He now ensures he spends more time with his family and is also looking to get a dog. Despite now being back at work full-time, Chris’s VRC has remained in contact with him and she regularly meets with him to check on his progress and offer ongoing support and guidance.

Chris’s Viewpoint

“No company should be without a Group Income Protection scheme. Companies often want to get their staff back to work but don’t know how to manage it. The support and intervention from Unum – for me personally as well as for my company – has been invaluable. My VRC was a lifeline to me and it was great to be able to talk to someone who really understood not only my condition, but also the issues surrounding long-term disability. I don’t believe people could return to work without this expertise.”

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