

Work Productivity *in Brain Tumor Survivors:* Study Results

INTRODUCTION

About two years ago, we announced an employment study seeking brain tumor survivors who were working. Visitors to the ABTA web site were invited to respond. The results of that study published in the July, 2007 issue of the *Journal of Environmental and Occupational Medicine*. The principal investigator for the study, Michael Feuerstein, PhD, MPH provided this summary for us.

RESULTS

Brain tumor survivors were asked a series of questions focused on the effects of their diagnosis and treatment relative to their work productivity. Fatigue, emotional distress and cognitive limitations (memory, organization and attention) were examined to determine if these symptoms influenced their work productivity. Problem-solving skills and positive health behaviors such as sleep, diet and exercise were also studied. The study surveyed employed adults with malignant brain tumors and a control group of employed adults who had never been diagnosed with cancer. The goal of the study was to determine whether brain tumor survivors experienced symptoms that impacted their work productivity differently than the control group.

Study results showed that although brain tumor survivors who worked were more stressed, fatigued and reported more cognitive limitations than the healthy comparison group, the influence of these factors on their work was no different than those who never had cancer. Brain tumor survivors did report exercising less, not watching their diets as much as the non-cancer group, and tended not to use positive approaches to solving problems. However, both groups reported that problems with depression, fatigue, cognition and sleep were related to how well they performed at work. The findings of this study provide important information for employers and employees, as well as occupational health counselors.

This was the first study to examine work productivity in brain tumor survivors. Further study of survivorship and employment concerns amongst brain tumor survivors is suggested.

ABOUT THE INVESTIGATOR

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STRATEGIES FOR SOLVING WORK-RELATED CHALLENGES

1. Evaluate the problem.
2. Consider consulting a neuropsychologist, clinical psychologist or vocational counselor.
3. Seek help with managing fatigue.
4. Seek help with managing mood changes.
5. Use a simple, six step approach to problem solving:
 - a. Define it.
 - b. Analyze it.
 - c. Brainstorm solutions.
 - d. Choose a realistic solution.
 - e. Try it.
 - f. Ask yourself if it helped.
6. Consider a job coach.
7. Repeat steps 1–6, if necessary.