

Web Tool Aims to Improve the Workplace for Breast Cancer Survivors

In a paper to be presented at the upcoming HFES 55th Annual Meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada, human factors/ergonomics researchers will describe WISE, a Web-based tool for breast cancer survivors designed to reduce work disabilities and improve employment outcomes.

Those who have beaten breast cancer comprise the largest population of cancer survivors in the United States. Many return to the workplace after treatment, but symptoms and long-term side effects can impact their ability to do their work. However, the good news is that very simple strategies can address these issues.

In the presentation “Improving Employment Outcomes of Breast Cancer Survivors: Development of a Web-Based Educational and Decision Support Tool,” authors Mary Sesto and colleagues explain how the WISE (Work ability Improvement through Symptom management and Ergonomic education) system can help survivors manage their symptoms, identify ergonomic workplace problems and risks, and implement workplace changes.

WISE users answer general screening questions about work-related activities and complete a checklist of specific work tasks, problems, and current symptoms (e.g. fatigue, pain). WISE provides users with tailored information on ergonomic changes they can make to increase their comfort in the workplace, along with tips for alleviating their symptoms.

“No effective intervention exists to improve employment outcomes following any cancer diagnosis, including breast cancer,” says Sesto. “There was a need to develop an interdisciplinary resource that provides customized information and decision support tools on how to effectively manage some of the problems that people may encounter in the workplace during and following cancer treatment. In our preliminary testing, both employers and survivors found the information in WISE to be helpful.”

Sesto hopes that WISE will help not only survivors who have returned to the workplace but also the roughly 30% of previously employed cancer survivors who have not returned to work. If WISE proves to be a successful and viable tool, Sesto and her team will develop additional tools that can be used by survivors of other types of cancer.

For more information on this and other research being presented at the HFES Annual Meeting, contact HFES Communications Director Lois Smith.

* * *

The Human Factors and Ergonomics Society is the world’s largest nonprofit individual-member, multidisciplinary scientific association for human factors/ergonomics professionals, with more than 4,600 members globally. HFES members include psychologists and other scientists, designers, and engineers, all of whom have a common interest in designing systems and equipment to be safe and effective for the people who operate and maintain them.