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Employee perspectives: Exploring the journey from paid work to retirement due onset of a dementia

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Abstract

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Employee perspectives: Exploring the journey from paid work to retirement due onset of a dementia

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Introduction: After a lifetime of chasing career ambitions, transitioning from employee to retiree requires considerable adjustment as one's occupational identity is redefined. However, of greater consequence is the impact of an unexpected transition to retirement for those experiencing symptoms of a dementia while still employed. Since approximately 42 million people globally will be living with a dementia by 2020 and retirement ages are also increasing, a proportion of those experiencing onset of dementia will be employed. Therefore, workplace practices reflective of legislated responsibilities to provide 'reasonable adjustment' are required to ameliorate the negative impact of an unplanned retirement.

Objectives: To explore how workforce participation choices and rights to 'reasonable adjustment' were accommodated by the employer, when symptoms of a dementia occurred at work.

Methodology: Semi-structured interviews conducted with Australians living with a dementia explored the transition from employment to retirement, due to onset of symptoms. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed to identify emergent themes that were compared and contrasted with reference to the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO).

Results: Factors contributing to positive and negative experiences of retirement due to a diagnosis of dementia were identified, including the significance of choice in workforce participation decisions.

Conclusion: This research informs academic literature and workplace policy regarding implications for the onset of symptoms of dementia for those in paid employment. Targeted strategies that acknowledge the rights of employees presenting with a dementia in the workplace and obligations of employers to accommodate 'reasonable adjustment' are required.