



Episodic Disabilities in the Workplace: Creating Healthy Workplace Environments

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**Canadian Working Group on HIV and
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Goal of Presentation

Discuss a framework for understanding the impact of episodic disabilities on the work environment and highlight leading practices to support patients and employees living with episodic disabilities.



Introduction to Episodic Disabilities

- Marked by fluctuating periods and degrees of wellness and illness
- Unpredictable
- Episodic disabilities include: some forms of mental illness, HIV/AIDS, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, arthritis, and some forms of cancer
- Presents challenges for active labour force participation, insurance benefits, income security, and social inclusion



Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation (CWGHR)

Established in 1998, *CWGHR emerged as an innovator* in bridging the traditionally separate worlds of HIV, disability and rehabilitation

CWGHR is a national charitable organization *aiming to address the complex and fluctuating health and social needs* of people living with HIV and other episodic conditions by improving access to rehabilitation care, support and services

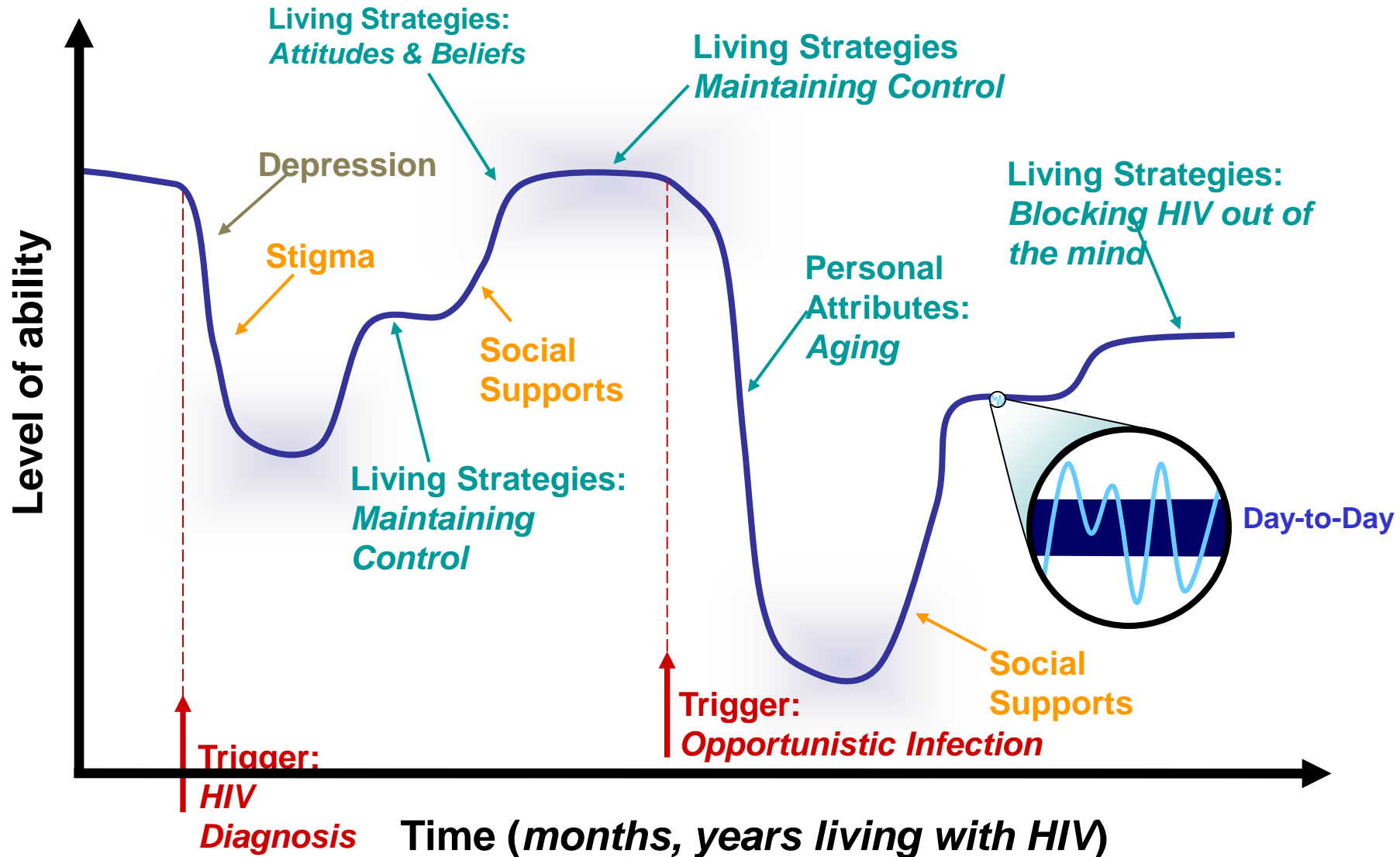


How CWGHR works

CWGHR's programs are based on 4 key pillars that are essential to developing and implementing comprehensive, effective and relevant rehabilitation policies and programs:

- **Education/knowledge exchange**
- **Policy**
- **Practice**
- **Research**

Episodic Disability Framework





Barriers to Employment for People Living with Episodic Disabilities



Common Barriers to Employment

- Attending medical appointments
- Health uncertainty
- Lack of access to timely care, treatment & support
- Stigma/Discrimination
- Medication side effects
- Balancing work and other aspects of life
- Lack of access to flexible workplace policies
- Lack of access to extended drug and health benefits



Understanding Episodic Disabilities and Employment

- Episodic disabilities will vary over time
- Possible concurrent conditions
- Require long term perspective
- Regular check-ins with patient
- Need access to supports outside of the workplace: emotional & community supports
- Workplace accommodations are available



When is an Accommodation Needed?

- Examples of times when a workplace accommodation may be needed:
 - Doctor's appointments
 - Periods of personal illness
 - Periods of illness with a family member
 - Taking medications at work
 - Dealing with the side effects of medications at work



Leading Practices in Episodic Disabilities and Employment



Helpful Hints for the Health Care Field

- Help the person understand that there will be periods of illness and wellness
- Determine if all needed medical supports are in place
- For those returning to the workplace, encourage the person to review the job requirements to determine if the core job requirements can be done over time



Helpful Hints for the Health Care Field

- For those currently working, review the job requirements to determine which job requirement(s) need accommodation and consider what type(s) of accommodation will be helpful
- Determine what other supports the person has that can assist with employment issues i.e. employment counselor
- Encourage the person to ask about the process of requesting an accommodation
- Know that disclosure of the illness is not required in most cases but disclosure of any functional limitations related to the job is needed



Examples of Accommodation Leading Practices

- Flex time
- A private space to take medications
- More frequent breaks
- A private space to rest
- Adaptive technologies
- Peer supports
- Part-time with full benefits
- Part-time with pro-rated benefits
- Consult an occupational therapist (OT)
- Visit the Job Accommodation Network website



Additional Workplace Supports

- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)
- Peer Associations
- Variety of disability associations (e.g. National Network on Mental Health (NNMH), The Arthritis Society, Canadian AIDS Society (CAS))
- Episodic Disabilities Employment Network (EDEN) website



Additional Information

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A faded, grayscale background image showing a group of people in a public setting. In the foreground, a person is seen from behind, pushing a wheelchair. Other individuals are standing and talking in the background.

Thank You

For more information see
www.hivandrehab.ca