

FYI

Disability Employment Initiative

The Kessler Foundation has awarded a \$425,000 employment grant to the Office of Research Services at the University of Hawaii in order to advance employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

This Signature Employment Grant supports the development of a virtual-reality software application entitled *EmployAble: A World Without Barriers*, which is being designed to help job seekers navigate the world of job hunting and adapt to the workplace.

The application includes a virtual employment orientation and support center, which is reportedly the first of its kind, and will serve people with disabilities, including veterans with traumatic brain injuries. It will be developed by a team of researchers, many of whom have disabilities, and collaborators include the University of Hawaii Center on Disability Studies, Virtual Ability and Abilicorp.

EmployAble will be designed to simulate social interactions in the workplace and demonstrate commonly used assistive technology, such as screen readers, a video-captioning program, accessible document creation, and presentation programs utilizing accessible features such as VoiceThread, Adobe Flash and text-to-speech software.

"Projects like *EmployAble* are especially important because TBI is the signature wound of Iraq and Afghanistan," says Rodger DeRose, president and CEO of the West Orange, N.J.-based Kessler Foundation. "We need to do all we can to ensure veterans' successful reintegration into society."

Should Pregnancy Be a Disability?

University of Dayton law professor Jeannette Cox thinks so, according to her paper *Pregnancy as a 'Disability' and (the) Americans with Disabilities Act (Amendment Act) of 2008*.

In the paper, which appears on Social Science Research Network's website, Cox argues that pregnant women should be covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act. In 2008, the Act was amended to include individuals with many minor and short-term disabilities, Cox tells the *Dayton Flyer News*, adding that pregnancy is comparable to these newly added disabilities.

"I think the strongest reaction has been from a feminist perspective, because they're concerned [about] linking pregnancy with disability," Cox tells *Dayton Flyer*. "Disability shouldn't be considered a negative thing. People who are deaf make wonderful employees if they have the proper accommodation."

But, according to University of Dayton political science professor Natalie Hudson, considering pregnancy as a disability is an improper way to confront the issue of pregnancy discrimination in the workplace.

"I think, in the short term, it's a really good thing but, in the long term, it doesn't challenge societal views of child rearing, pregnancy or childcare in the workplace," Hudson tells the site. "It makes a woman less than she can fully be and I would argue that pregnancy makes a woman more"

Disability Management Resource Re-launched

The Standard Insurance Co. is re-launching its Workplace Possibilities website, workplacepossibilities.com, to provide a more comprehensive resource for human resource professionals looking for innovative ways to prevent and manage absence and disability in the workplace.

Through the website, a Workplace Possibilities consultant helps to connect employees with their health-management programs and identifies opportunities to keep at-risk employees on the job or help them return to work faster. The site is designed to deliver rapid and measurable reductions in absence- and disability-related costs while also improving the efficiency of the HR team and increasing employee satisfaction.

Among its features, the new site includes a news section to provide timely releases and contributed articles from its team of absence, disability and wellness experts as well as a blog for HR professionals.

"Since we launched the Workplace Possibilities blog in February 2011, the subscriber base has been building steadily, and members have embraced the site as a learning resource," says Alison Daily, second vice president of medical and return-to-work services. "Our team of experts is passionate about sharing tools and tips to help employers rethink the way they manage absence and disability."

Jobs Picture Still Murky for Disabled

A new analysis of the U.S. Department of Labor's most recent figures by Shaun Heasley of DisabilityScoop.com shows unemployment among Americans with disabilities dropped to 12.9 percent in January, down from 13.5 percent at the end of 2011.

But while that may sound like good news, the gains appear to be—at least in part—a result of fewer people with disabilities looking for work, Heasley reports.

"In fact, the number of people within this group who were employed declined in January," he writes, "as did the number considered part of the labor source, meaning that they were working or seeking a job."

The Labor Department began tracking employment among people with disabilities in October 2008, Heasley says, and its data covers those over the age of 16 who do not live in institutions.