



Working Beyond “Retirement”

Vivian Plummer, PTA
Physical Therapist Assistant
Andover Physical Therapy

What use to be the norm-retiring at 62 or 65- is passé. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “In 2006 29% of people in their late 60’s were employed up 18% from 1985”. Many individuals over 60 are choosing not only to remain active but stay in the workforce. A survey at AARP found 70% of older workers are working well into retirement years. Physical therapist are seeing and increase in injuries that typically were seen in younger patients such as repetitive injuries (tendonitis and carpal tunnel) and injuries of tendons and ligaments in knees and shoulders due to more physical jobs.

Older patient’s expectations have changed and they now want to get back to their physical activities as well as back to work. The down side is that older patients can’t make the gains as quickly as their younger counterparts can. Physical therapist struggle to balance the need to be aggressive and knowing the patient won’t heal as quick as well as the insurance companies putting a restraint on the number of visits, therefore making it difficult to meet goals in a realistic time frame.

Physical therapist need to help those patients find better ways to perform their jobs that allows them to be safer and decrease the chance of injury. Strategies like teaching the patient better body mechanics, the importance of taking frequent breaks and slowing their work pace down. Older patients should also be taught exercises they can do on their own to help prevent injury. It is important that the physical therapist review what hazards may at the work place that could make it easier for the worker to sustain an injury then make sure the patient talks to their employer to remove the hazards that would cause an injury.

As we see more and more “retirees” choosing to delay their retirement we must encourage functional activities to help the patient succeed. Designing a strategy to help the patient with this will allow them not only work longer, but also be able to enjoy and maintain their active lifestyles when the decision to retire comes.