

## Formerly Injured Nurse Is Now Ohio RETAIN's Greatest Ambassador

The Ohio RETAIN program coordinates health care and employment services to help recently injured or ill workers remain in the workforce. Return-to-work coordinators and medical care team members create stay-at-work/return-to-work (SAW/RTW) plans that identify workplace accommodations that participants may need. The program also offers vocational assistance and, when needed, helps participants gain access to supportive resources for food, transportation, and rent assistance.

### BACKGROUND

Nicole, a nurse with Bon Secours Mercy Health, joined Ohio RETAIN after she was injured in a car accident. She had initially returned to work immediately following the accident, but after three days, the pain in her shoulder had worsened until she could no longer move her arm. She then went to the emergency room and learned that she had broken her shoulder. “The seat belt actually jammed it up in there and cracked it,” Nicole says.

Nicole’s job duties typically included heavy physical tasks like moving patients from beds, transferring patients from wheelchairs, and lifting patient harness equipment, as well as bedside care including administering injections and medications. She would not be able to work during her recovery.

### CHALLENGE

Nicole initially thought she would be out of work for only for six weeks, but within a month of the accident, she had developed a tremor and brain fog. “At one point, I could hardly feed myself. I had to teach myself to eat with my other hand because my hand shook so bad,” Nicole says.

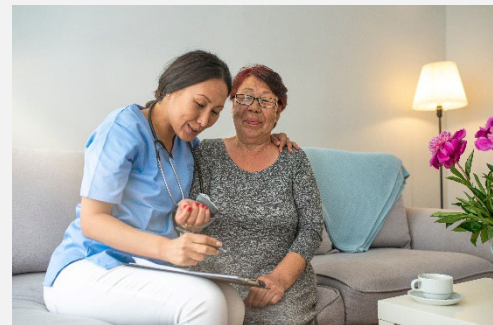
She became depressed and anxious because her injury prevented her from playing with her young child. It also kept her from engaging in hobbies like karate and crochet.

Nicole’s supervisor expressed concern about her returning to bedside care with a pronounced hand tremor. Nicole realized she would be out of work longer than expected—six months, not six weeks—and began visiting specialists to discover the reason for the tremor.



### Challenge-Action-Results

**Challenge:** Nicole, a hospital nurse, could not return to work for six months because of a shoulder injury from a car accident.



**Action:** Ohio RETAIN assessed her needs, collaborated with her health care team, helped her coordinate job accommodations, and followed up with the medical team.

**Results:** Nicole recovered from her injuries and successfully returned to work, where she actively promotes the Ohio RETAIN program among her colleagues.



## ACTIONS

Kimberly Brickler, a Health Services Coordinator from Ohio RETAIN reached out to Nicole and connected her with a social worker who shared information about supportive services. To help Nicole recover from her injuries and return to work, Ohio RETAIN implemented several strategies:

**Assessed needs.** Kimberly collaborated with Nicole’s physician, the social worker, and Nicole to tailor a SAW/RTW plan that included physical

therapy and case management services. “They were able to get me help that I sometimes didn’t even know I needed yet,” Nicole says. Her Ohio RETAIN care team also encouraged her to request a medical leave of absence from her employer.

Nicole’s physician prescribed lifting restrictions, so the RETAIN team coached Nicole on how to request job accommodations to temporarily reduce the amount of weight she was expected to lift. As a precaution, Kimberly also helped Nicole explore other roles within Bon Secours Mercy Health. However, Nicole’s employer agreed to modify her job tasks during her recovery.

**Coordinated medical care.** When Nicole was nearing the end of her medical leave, she needed help coordinating her care and communicating with her medical providers. When a key medical test was delayed because Nicole’s specialist was on vacation, Kimberly interceded and Nicole was able to continue her recovery without interruption.

**Facilitated a successful recovery.** Nicole had visited several specialists to treat her tremor, but she wasn’t seeing improvement. She was feeling overwhelmed trying to navigate various health care systems and providers and shared her frustration with being shuffled from one office to another. “[Kimberly] was the one helping me reach out to doctors because I was just kind of getting passed along,” Nicole says. To address Nicole’s frustrations, Kimberly contacted Nicole’s first physician to arrange for another exam to appropriately diagnose her continuing discomfort and to update her SAW/RTW plan.

With support from Kimberly and Ohio RETAIN, along with her own determination, Nicole was able to progress through her SAW/RTW plan, overcome health care barriers, and return to her patients’ bedside as a charge nurse. She now encourages others to use Ohio RETAIN. “I tell all my doctors and providers how great the RETAIN program is and how they should encourage patients to participate,” Nicole says.

*“I would recommend the Ohio RETAIN program to anyone injured outside of work. Kimberly, my health care coordinator, was key to me getting the proper care at times and was a huge help in communicating with my doctors between appointments. She anticipated my needs before I did sometimes. If it wasn’t for Kimberly with RETAIN initiating the communication, I would still be stuck in bed in debilitating pain.” —Nicole, RETAIN participant*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RESULTS

Ohio RETAIN helps program participants improve their quality of life by fostering success at work after any injury or illness.

- Nicole’s physician, social worker, and nurse worked together with Nicole to map out a RTW plan.
- Kimberly, the Ohio RETAIN health services coordinator, helped manage all of Nicole’s support services—including getting a health reassessment and referral for tests—and addressed Nicole’s anxiety and depression.
- Ohio RETAIN helped Nicole coordinate workplace accommodations with her employer that supported her successful return to work.
- The social worker continued to follow up with Nicole throughout her RETAIN enrollment period to make sure she had what she needed to maintain her successful return to work.



*Ohio is participating in RETAIN (Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network) to build connections and improve coordination among employers, health care providers, and other key parties to help newly injured and ill workers stay in the workforce. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, in coordination with several partners, leads Ohio RETAIN. The U.S. Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, sponsors RETAIN.*

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