

Returning to Work



In 2015, 5 years after diagnosis with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis, I was forced to leave my job as a nurse. The cognitive impact of MS had become too much for me to practice in a safe way. My employer was incredibly gracious and understanding. I applied for Social Security Disability and refocused on therapies and techniques to help me live a better, more functional life. Two more years of disease-modifying therapy changes, flares and Social Security appeals would pass before I finally hit a plateau.

Life became a tad more predictable. I was able to increase my volunteering initiatives, and the routine of everyday living became, well, every day.

2020 marks 10 years of living with diagnosed multiple sclerosis for me. I knew this was going to be a milestone year, but I had no idea that after my MS medical retirement, I would be re-entering the workforce.

This seemingly impossible goal had always been in the back of my mind. I had spoken with my neurologist during our twice-yearly appointments about long-term goals, and returning to work was always on the goals list. The summer of 2020 gave me an opportunity to see how I could function in a very casual work environment and test the skills I have learned to improve my cognitive function. I learned in short order that nursing skills, relying heavily on retaining and recalling knowledge off the “top of my head,” was not the best way for me to function. However, I learned tips from my neuropsychologist that to the outside observer may look like “hyper organization,” but to me are an external way of keeping information available and accessible that my MS-impacted brain cannot.



I found some online courses in human resource management to dip a toe into the learning pool. I was finding that policies and procedures made sense, and I could operate in written directions and structures safely and efficiently. I contacted the MS Navigators and told them what I was discovering. The MS Navigators counseled me about the Social Security Administration's "Ticket to Work" program, and how to connect with those resources.

I reached out to the Social Security Administration and was so encouraged by the information I received about attempting a return to work, I cleared the return to work plan with my neurologist, and again received encouragement and counseling about different outcomes. I reached out to my potential employer, and we again reviewed expectations and a variety of outcomes.

In early November, I returned to work. Five years and 7 months after I had signed out of my computer work station, I logged back in. I have a different job title now, one that is out of the clinical realm and fully in my newly acquired skill set of policy and procedure. Human Resources is a better fit for me now, as I adapted to the limitations that living with MS imposed and overcame those limitations with new skills.

The fear of losing my SSDI benefits is no longer there. The "Ticket to Work" Program and the MS Navigators helped educate and encourage me to give employment a chance. I am so thankful for the opportunities and adventures that 2020 has brought me, and proud to say: I am back to work.

Editor's Note: Reach out to an [MS Navigator](#) for information, resources and support to help you live your best life with MS.