



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

# "Helping Veterans with Polytrauma Get Back to Work"

An Overview of the  
CWT/SE/Polytrauma Program at the  
James J. Peters VAMC, Bronx, NY

# VISN 3 Polytrauma Conference

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# Definition of Supported Employment (SE)

- Enriching the lives of veterans by providing direct, individualized placement into community employment based on the individual's preferences, skills and abilities, with follow-along support in the community.
- Supported employment emphasizes empowerment, integrity, dignity, independence and individualized choice to allow for veterans to integrate into meaningful community-based activities.
- "Real jobs, real pay and real co-workers."



# History of Supported Employment

- Designed for people with severe developmental disabilities, later expanded to people with psychiatric disabilities
- Initiated in the early 1980's as a response to very limited employment opportunities
- Replaced work in segregated work settings with work in the community

# Benefits of Work



- Important in defining a person's identity
- Provides structure and meaning to a person's life
- Increased quality of life
- Greater self-confidence, self-esteem, status and independence

# Why SE for Polytrauma?

- Polytrauma presents many barriers
  - Memory, attention, concentration, pain
- Accommodations needed in the workplace
  - wheelchair-accessible, eliminating physical tasks from a job, such as lifting heavy boxes, placing someone in a less stressful position at work



# Why do Veterans diagnosed with Polytrauma need Supported Employment? (continued)

- Accommodations can be requested in a new job or in an existing job when the veteran returns from military service
- Vocational Rehab. Counselor will assess the veteran's limitations and need for accommodations

# Why SE for Polytrauma? (continued)

- Veterans may lose a sense of identity when they leave the military
- Veterans may not be able to go back to their former jobs
- Veterans may want to try a different job
- Many veterans do not have connections to get a job (It can take 42 job development contacts to generate 1 job offer. {Gervey & Kowal, 1995})
- Supported Employment provides supports so veterans can maintain their jobs

# SE Supports

- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors/Employment Specialists (available by phone 24/7)
- Job Coaches
- Ongoing communication with employer if necessary
- Troubleshooting to avoid problems
- Training in workplace if necessary
- Ongoing education to employers & staff
- Arranging for workplace accommodations

# Should a veteran disclose disabilities?

- Veteran's Choice
- Necessary to disclose to obtain accommodations (Supports or modifications sometimes needed in the workplace to ensure success)
- Risky when applying for some jobs (Stigma)
- Decrease risk when done with Employment Specialist

# Counseling psychologist will...

- Complete the initial vocational evaluation and plan
- Reduce barriers such as anxiety, stress, physical pain using biofeedback, counseling and stress management techniques
- Provide linkage to polytrauma and CWT/SE teams

# Vocational Specialist will...

- Initial evaluation reviewing work history, interests and goals
- Develop an IPE
- Rapid job search (Includes Resume Development)
- Interviews (can be accompanied by vocational rehab. counselor/ employment specialist)
- Job placement
- Implement job supports if necessary

# Initiating Supported Employment

- Early intervention is key
- Promote motivation and desire to work
- Veterans see themselves as valuable members of society rather than as “disabled professional patients”
- Rehabilitation Team Support of Supported Employment is very important (Veterans trust their Rehab. Team)
- Available to both inpatients and outpatients
- Work should not be added on to end of treatment, but incorporated into all aspects of rehabilitation
- Medical clearance is necessary to return to work
- Physicians can write prescription for SE when veteran is medically cleared to work

# Barriers to Employment

- Medical issues
- Decreased mobility
- Pain
- Depression
- PTSD
- Anxiety
- Fear of losing benefits
- Lack of family or peer support

# Removing Barriers to Employment

- Ongoing medical treatment
- Supportive treatment providers
- Flexible medical appointment hours
- Treatment for pain (medication, acupuncture, biofeedback)
- Treatment for depression, anxiety, PTSD
- Benefits counseling (VBA, Social Security)
- Involve family and/or friends in Supported Employment Process

# Critical Features of Supported Employment (SE)

- "Given adequate supports, everyone is capable of competitive employment." (Anthony & Blanch, 1987; Ford, 1995; Roberts, 1996)
- Rehab Act defines SE as "competitive work in an integrated work setting, with ongoing support services, for individuals with severe handicaps for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred or has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of severe handicaps". (Federal Register, 1992, p. 28438)

# The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

- Passed by Congress in 1990
- Designed to protect people with disabilities in five areas: employment, transportation, telecommunication, public accommodation, and the business of local and state government.
- Prohibits discrimination against any qualified person because of their disability in all areas of employment (hiring, firing, advancement, compensation and training)

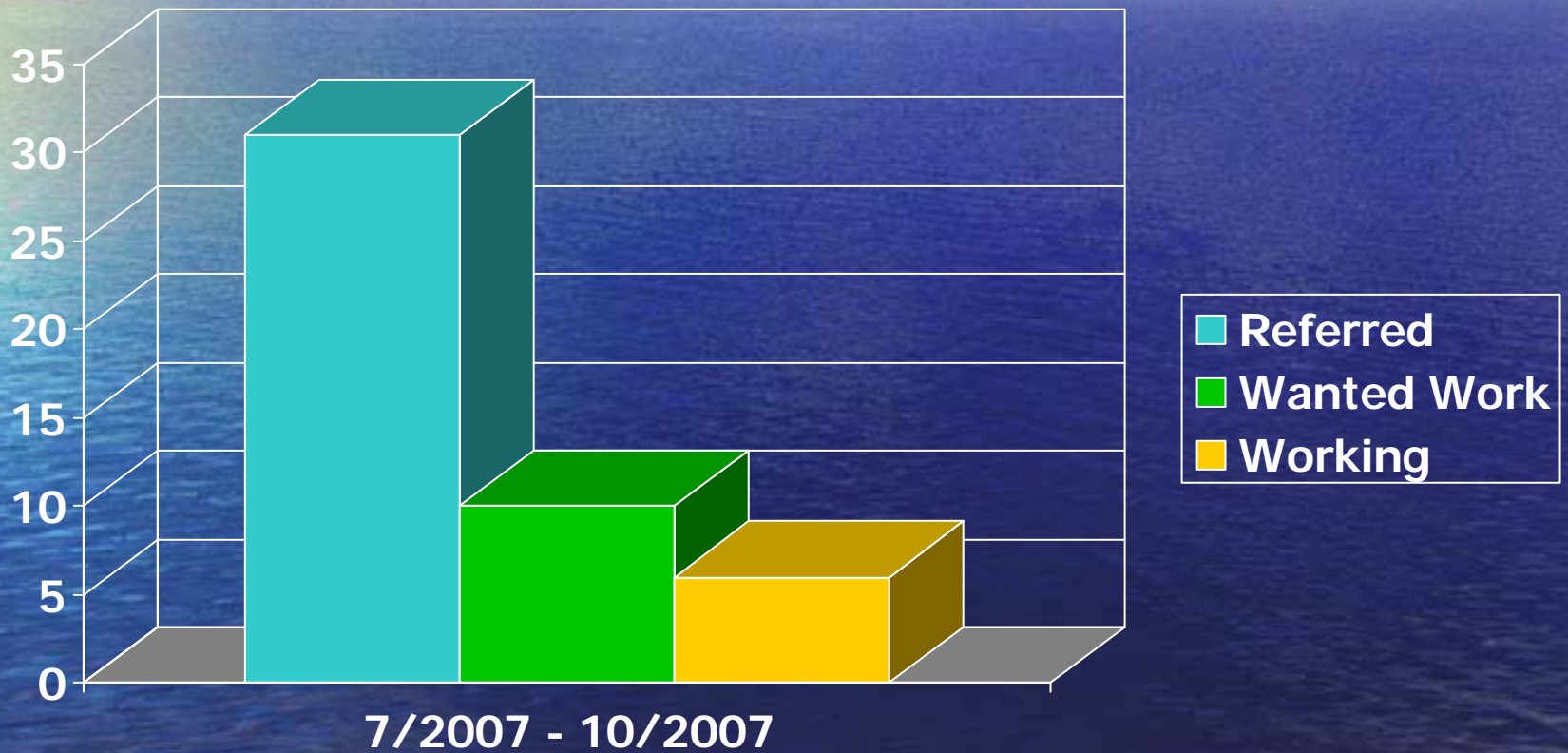
# ADA (continued)

- Requires that employers consider whether a qualified applicant is able to perform the “essential functions” of the job with or without accommodations.
- A “qualified applicant” is one who has the experience or credentials required for the job.
- “Essential functions” are tasks that are integral to the job.

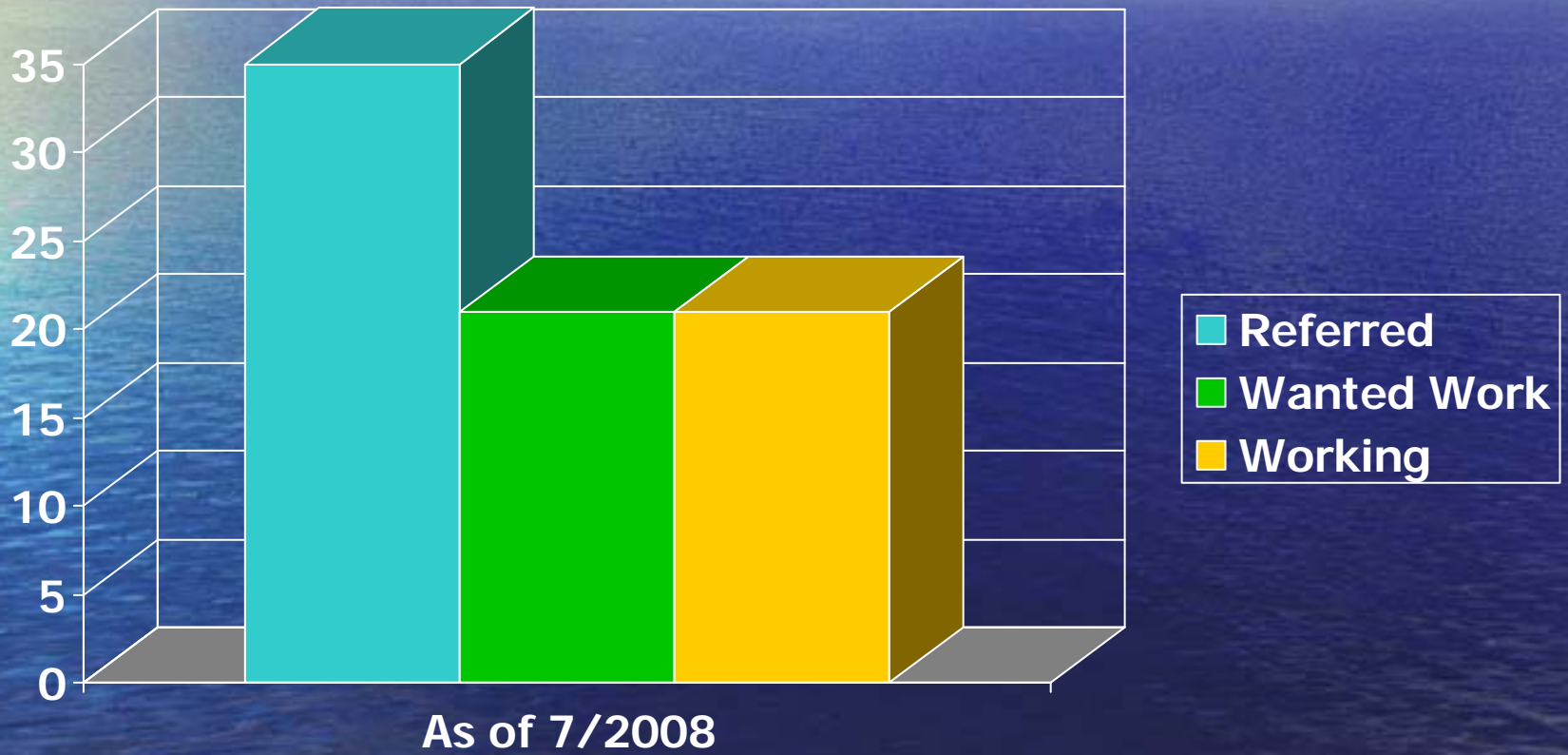
# Recovery Model

- Holistic view of illness that focuses on the person, not just symptoms
- Recovery can be achieved
- Recovery is not a cure
- The patient/client decides on the treatment and the course of treatment
- It is important to live a life with meaning
- An illness should not dictate the ultimate course of one's life

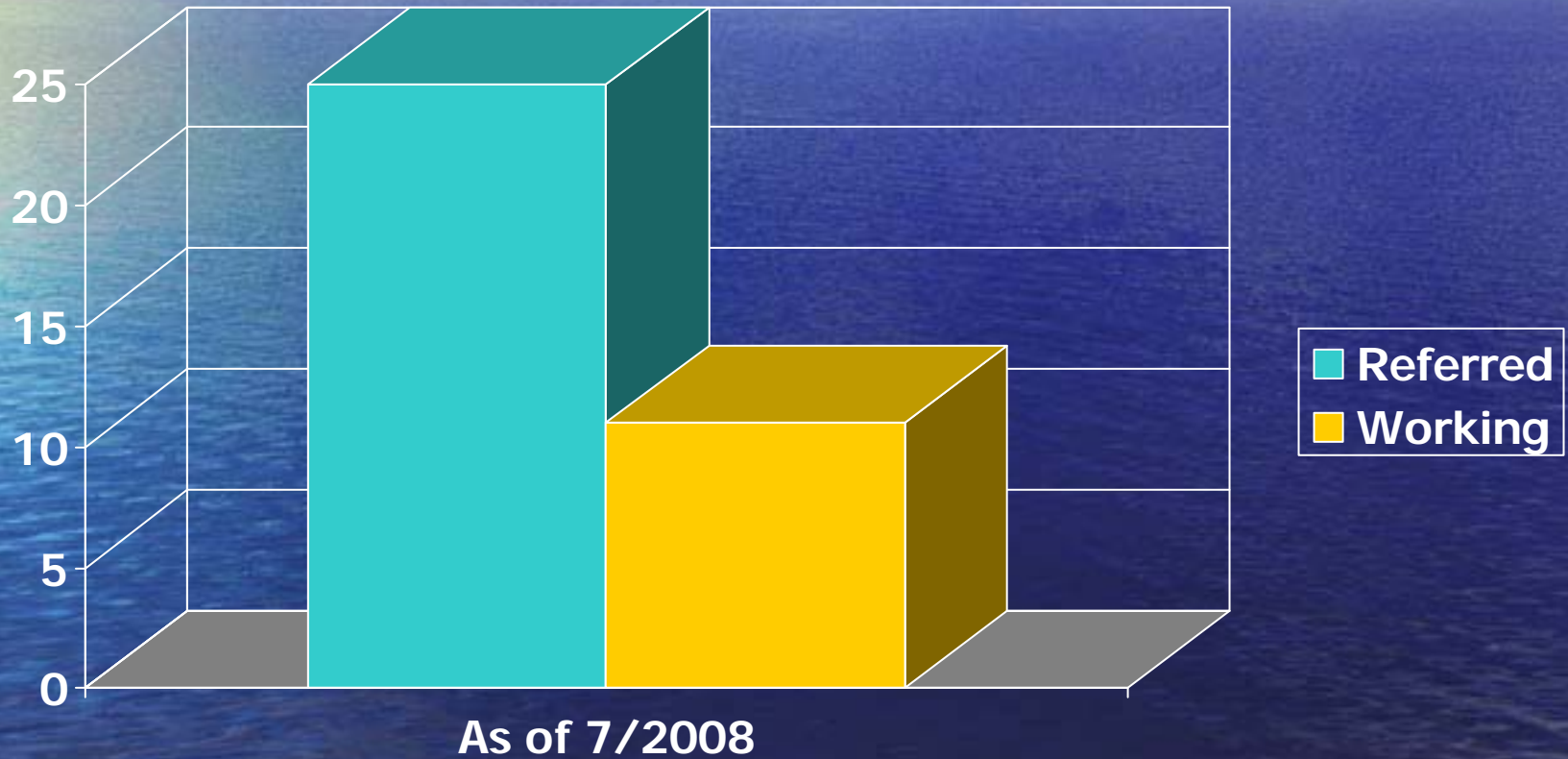
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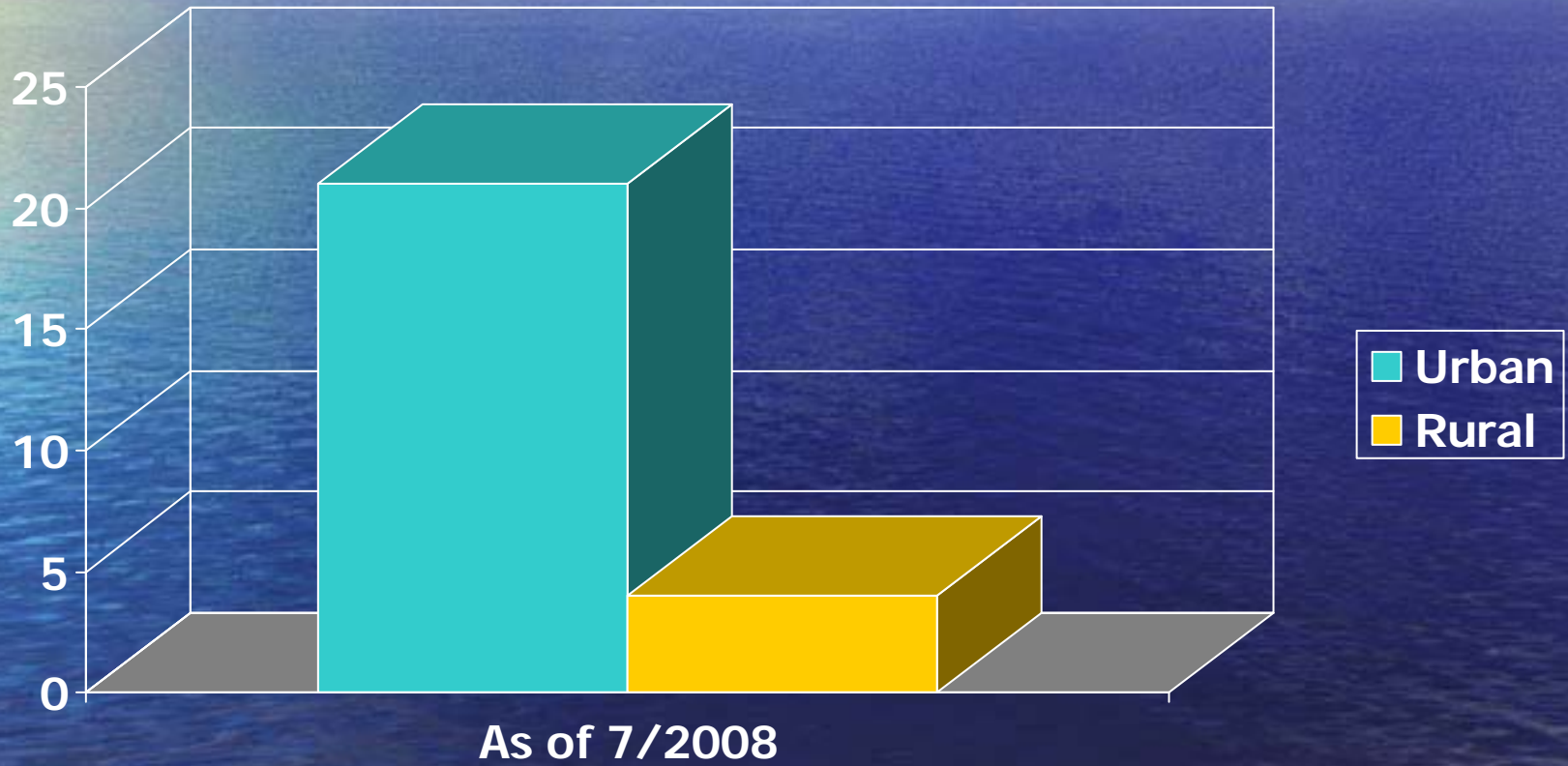
# So far...



# Current Caseload



# Urban vs. Rural



# Referral to CWT/SE/Polytrauma Program

- Need consult from physician
- Must have polytrauma diagnoses (TBI and other medical diagnosis, including PTSD)
- We provide: supported employment, vocational counseling, vocational assessment, biofeedback (to remove barriers to employment)

# Characteristics of Caseload

- All have mild TBI
- All have PTSD (moderate to severe)
- Other physical injuries include:
  - spinal and neck injuries
  - hip, knee, ankle and wrist injuries
  - eye and ear injuries

# Accommodations

- 8 out of 25 vets
  - 3 have on-site job coaching
  - 1 re-assigned to a different job
  - 1 requesting re-assignment
  - 1 requesting to attend treatment during working hours
  - 2 had physical accommodations

# Referrals Screened by Counseling Psychologist (5/07-7/08)

- 114 Total referred
  - 76 seen in person
  - 11 on waitlist
  - 4 duplicates
  - 14 declined
  - 20 non-responders

# CWT/SE/Polytrauma Program @ James J. Peters VAMC

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Questions?

