

Disability, Long Term Care & Employee Benefit Advisory

AccessABLE Travel . . . and Doing Your Homework

A recent vacation taught me some valuable lessons about accessible travel I would like to share with you. My own temporary disability lasting only a few months presented me with valuable first hand experiences that will benefit our readers.

My several decade career, specializing as a Disability Insurance Advisor, gave me a unique perspective being actively involved with employees of client companies filing long term disability (LTD) claims. We essentially “counseled” disabled employees that were filing LTD claims who didn’t understand the claims process.

“Hitting the Wall” . . . At the point of becoming disabled, there’s the “shock” of we “cross the line” in a single moment. One minute we’re healthy, the next we’re disabled. It happens in the time it took you to read this paragraph.

The most obvious impact on their “psyche” began with the psychological impact of no longer being in excellent health without any limitations. When added to the instantaneous negative impact on their medical condition, its’ been likened to “walking into a wall”. In addition to the physical and emotional trauma of becoming disabled, then added impact of an immediate change in lifestyle can be overwhelming to the hardiest of souls.

How do we get to the bedroom on the second floor in a wheelchair? How will you get into the shower? Where do we buy grab rails for the bathroom? And who is going to install them? For seniors with arthritic hands, where do we find dress or shoes with velcro enclosures. They are most welcome benefits for seniors with arthritic fingers.

At the worst imaginable time, decisions on adapting to a completely new, very different lifestyle needs to be made.

As I was a month away from rotator cuff surgery, I couldn’t use one arm in a normal manner. Taking public transportation from de Gaulle Airport in Paris led us to the “tube” (the rapid transit system under the streets of London). Arriving at our stop downstairs from our hotel, we discovered there was no “lift” (an elevator to street level). After dragging two heavy suitcases with one arm, up very steep stairs, I was grateful for my “good” arm.

Upon returning home to the U.S., I went on-line and did my very first accessible travel search. My first task was to pull up a map of the London rapid transit system and a whole new world of opportunity appeared on my computer screen. There was a map of the entire London rapid transit system where I could see all the transit stations that had “lifts” (elevators).

I then might have searched for hotels and bed & breakfasts that were close to the stations with lifts. Were I disabled the next time around, I would simply do some accessible travel planning to enjoy a trip to London.

The key message here is to “do your homework” before embarking on your vacation travels. My guess is that future vacations will bring you more enjoyment then you might have imagined.

The next part of my accessible travel journey was an invitation to speak to a Parkinson’s support group. As I had created a handbook on accessible travel opportunities, a young lady had discovered my publication and bio on-line. She asked if I would be willing to speak on accessible travel to a group of 40 to 50 people that consisted of Parkinson patients and their caregivers.

What I learned next is probably the most valuable lesson I can offer anyone with any form of impairment or disability that used to travel but has stopped completely. My epiphany occurred when I simply asked if the members of the support group were having any difficulties with their travels. What I heard next was “yes”, it seems that everyone in the group had basically stopped traveling completely!

Since my work life involved helping people file disability claims, I discovered there were a multitude of variations in the severity of Parkinson’s. I learned there were folks with the symptom’s that initially lead to a specific (Parkinson’s) diagnosis all the way to those who were seriously impaired and totally disabled. It seems that with the initial diagnosis, that was a primary factor in stopping their travel. Possibly an assumption was made that continuing to travel would be too much to deal with.

In wondering what had transpired, there was no way to know whether a conscious or subconscious decision had been made. I wondered whether it was fear of the unknown, or possibly assuming “it” (travel) would be too much to handle. Was there possibly an apprehension about being away from their doctors or treatment facilities? Or was it just fearing the unknown?

Another option I pondered had to do with how many of us feel more comfortable with familiar surroundings. We’ve all heard the expression “creatures of habit”. For most people, we know that “home is where the heart is”. More than being heartfelt, our homes are where we’re most comfortable. Familiar surroundings bring us a sense of comfort.

Don’t we all have our favorite restaurants? I know for me that there’s at least three different routes I can take to drive to my office, all about the same distance yet I have to make a conscious effort to change my route.

Returning to my Parkinson’s support group experience, each member came with a spouse, parent or friend who were caregivers. I asked the audience for a show of hands of those who had Parkinson’s. I then asked if it was upsetting that the vacation trips had stopped. There was universal acknowledgement.

I fully understand it can be most upsetting watching a loved one facing a downturn health wise. There’s no way a healthy caregiver can fully appreciate the impact of diminishing health. The most relevant point I want to make is that you’re the one who is becoming more frail due to a compromised medical condition, please note the impact on your life partner who’s no longer joining you on vacations and acknowledge your awareness of their care and changes in lifestyle.

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Allan Checkoway, RHU most recently authored **“I’m Disabled . . . Now What?”**, created for people whose lives have been impacted by changes in their overall health. Fortunately, our decades of experiences in working with people who have become disabled, sometimes ending up in long term care situations has given us a unique perspective that can benefit our readers. We’ve taken what we believe to be all the best up to date accessABLE resources from a multitude of resources, putting them all together in one place in **“I’m Disabled . . . Now What?”** and on our new website www.DisabilityandSeniorResources.com. **We are dedicated to helping restore active**

lifestyles. Allan is presently the Principal of Disability Services Group, an Employee Benefit Advisory firm. Allan's address is 661 Highland Ave. Suite 103, Needham, MA 02494, tel: 781.400.5055; email: allan@disabilityservices.com