



## Certified Professionals Embrace Career Challenges



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*In this second of three Bulletins, Canada's Certified Disability Management Professionals (CDMPs) and Certified Return to Work Coordinators (CRTWCs) share more on their backgrounds, jobs and future plans. One CDMP is close to retirement, another has spent less than five years in the field; all bring impressive resumes to jobs they love in the disability management field.*

*The designations of Certified Return to Work Coordinator (CRTWC) and Certified Disability Management Professional (CDMP), administered under the auspices of the International Disability Management Standards Council (IDMSC), are increasingly becoming the gold standard in disability management practice worldwide.*

### **Transit Commission DM Specialist combines MBA with CDMP designation**

Sandra Cancar-Stojicic holds a BA (Hons) from York University where she majored in Labour Relations and Environmental Studies. She followed that with an Advanced Business Administration Certificate, then an MBA in 2008, which she completed while working full time. "It required a lot of hard work and discipline," she notes.

She was working as an assistant manager for WSIB and Legal at the head office of Mac's Convenience Stores in Ontario and while completing her MBA, she was responsible for managing all WCB occupational injury claims for employees at Mac's stores across Canada, as well as working closely with company lawyers on litigation and insurance claims. The majority of her occupational injury claim files included psychological/mental health claims. "Dealing with the aftermath of random acts of violence, such as robberies, was definitely challenging. It required a strategy for assisting employees by ensuring they received adequate treatment, planned and implemented accommodations such as gradual return to work plans, and removing any workplace barriers. In addition, I was responsible for educating our front line supervisors on best practices on how to work with those employees."

"Working at Mac's Convenience Stores is when I first got to see the benefits of an effective DM program and the positive impact that initial contact and support had on the injured employee and ultimately their early and safe return to work, as well as the cost-saving from a business perspective," she explains. She gained a lot of valuable experience as well, dealing with various WCBs across Canada. "I had to know and comply with all the different legislation and rules for every province. I enjoyed doing that and dealing with case managers at different WCBs."

Today, she brings these skills to her role as Disability Management Specialist (DMS) – WSIB in Occupational Health & Claims Management at the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC). Her role now focuses on disability management and return to work. She works closely with Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) and acts as a liaison for all the stakeholders (injured employee, WSIB, union and management) for all the services that are being provided and ensures early and regular contact with the injured/ill employees, managing the confidential medical file including treatment, progress and ensuring that appropriate assessments have occurred. Applying collective agreements, informing employees on their eligibility and benefit entitlement, using her conflict resolution skills, and fulfilling the duty to accommodate are all



part of her job. The TTC puts a lot of resources at her disposal to help, including access to medical consultants and physiotherapists on staff.

“There are a lot of great tools available at the TTC that assist me in efficiently doing my job,” she advises. “My objective is always providing exceptional support to the injured/ill employees in order to help them in their rehabilitation and successful early and safe return to work.”

Before joining the TTC in 2010, Cancar-Stojicic worked at Canada Post Corporation as a claims officer – WSIB. At Canada Post, she was responsible for WSIB claims management for a number of different GTA locations including one of the largest letter processing plants in Canada. It was at that job in 2009 that she first became aware of NIDMAR, as it is Canada Post’s mandate for employees working in DM roles to become certified.

“I read more about NIDMAR and the CDMP designation, and realized it was something I definitely wanted to pursue,” she says, adding, “More and more companies are looking at CDMP and CRTWC as a new standard in this line of work.”

From there, Cancar-Stojicic took some of the modules online; however, her most useful tool, she advises, was the NIDMAR manual. She found the reading helpful and was comfortable with the kind of self-study approach she’s used in the past. She passed the CDMP examination in 2011. The modules she took and the reading enhanced her awareness of the “legal, moral, social and financial impact of DM.”

Now that she has her designation in DM, Cancar-Stojicic says, “I think twice now and cross-reference myself to make sure that I’m applying the core skills, competencies and meeting legal obligations.” “Having the CDMP validates that my work meets specific standards, and I feel proud of that.”

Down the road, she would like to have an opportunity to use her MBA to its full potential, in conjunction with her CDMP designation. She would like to see doors open in the future in the area of consulting and adds that as teaching has always been a passion, she would welcome the opportunity to pursue that in the future.

### **CDMP envisions refinements to company DM program**

Carol Czynski, CDMP, obtained a Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Kinesiology in 1998. Fresh out of university, her first job was handling functional abilities evaluations for motor vehicle accident clients. In 2000, she joined Manulife Financial as an LTD adjudicator, before being promoted to a disability specialist role, where she trained other case managers, provided feedback on complex claims management and did appeals work. A brief contract position followed as a rehabilitation consultant with Great West Life and in this role, Czynski facilitated RTW planning between employers, STD/LTD



claimants and their health care practitioners.

For the past three years, she has worked for Sysco Canada in the role of Ability Manager, responsible for managing WSIB and other disability claims for the company's various Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada locations. Her job involves developing modified work offers and plans, return to work plans, and accommodations strategies. She works in close partnership with the Health & Safety and Human Resources team at Sysco, which develops and drives company-wide programs and initiatives in DM. Reviewing and analyzing financial information related to WSIB and other absence-management activities are also an important aspect of her job.

Czyrski was inspired to earn her CDMP in 2011 and she explains why. "Since the field of disability management is a sort of niche career market, I wanted to ensure that future potential employers have a clear understanding of my background and the expertise that I bring. The designation also demonstrates that my skills remain up to date."

She took several of the NIDMAR modules and found those that addressed labour-management issues were particularly helpful, since she works with a variety of unions in her current role. "The knowledge that I gained by taking the modules certainly has given a greater depth to the work that I do, and has helped me gain a greater understanding and ability to deal with the many factors at play when it comes to successful disability management."

Overall, she has a number of goals in her current job that she hopes to fulfill, aided by the knowledge she's gained through certification.

"I'd like to continue to improve and refine Sysco's Disability Management program. Currently, my focus is disability management related to workplace injuries; however, the field of mental health and wellness is of great interest to me, and I'd like to add this to my current scope. It's important to help our employees dealing with mental health issues so they can continue to thrive in our workplace. Helping supervisors and managers develop their skills and abilities to deal with these types of issues in the workplace is a key component to that, and facilitating this type of training, as well as providing one-on-one support is something I look forward to."

### **CDMP continues to advance skills after more than 30 years on the job**

Allan Ackerman, CDMP, has been with Canada Post since 1981. He describes himself as "well seasoned" and, laughing, adds "my hair is natural Arctic blonde now." Ackerman now holds the title Claims Officer – WSIB, Occupational Abilities Management. He is eligible to retire now. "I could leave this Friday with an unreduced pension," he says, but adds that he's enjoying his job too much to leave yet.



Over the years, Ackerman has worked his way through Canada Post's system, advancing first from postal clerk to supervisor. In 1995, he was promoted again and began handling a dual role as prevention officer, also responsible for disability management. "I would know what types of accidents were happening, when and why. It made sense to also do the WSIB claims." He continued in that job for almost 10 years.

In 2004, Canada Post separated the prevention and DM roles, and appointed Ackerman and another staff member to look after claims management, specifically for the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) of Ontario. He is now one of six claims officers covering the Greater Toronto Area, which includes about 17,000 letter carriers, 5,000 staff handling mail and 500 supervisors. In terms of Canada Post overall, Ackerman notes, "We are rather large; 60,000-plus as a whole, all the way to postal clerks to drivers to the president."

In keeping with the policies of Canada Post's Disability Management Centre of Excellence, by 2009, Ackerman was approached and asked to become certified by writing the CDMP exam. He passed in June 2011.

He explains that Canada Post determined which NIDMAR modules would be most beneficial for employees. In all, Ackerman completed nine modules. For him, five really stood out as the most beneficial. His list of "absolute must" modules includes: Overview/Introduction to Return to Work Coordination, Effective Disability Management Programs, Human Resources, Mental Health, Disability Management in Unionized Organizations, and Legislation and Disability Management. "These were all very critical to me," he stresses. And they've changed how he does his job. "I've taken more of a lead role in return to work meetings." He feels that, as a CDMP, he can educate others about why disability management is important. "The employee comes first," he says. "When there are barriers, I say, 'let's work it out.' I act like an alternative dispute resolution."

Ackerman arrives at work by 6:00 am everyday so he can be sure to have some personal time with people arriving at work, and to communicate to those working nights that "you are not the forgotten shift." His philosophy is that you have to be there when the work is actually being done. "You can't know what barriers there are unless you see people physically working."

Even though he's now eligible, Ackerman has no plans to retire. But when he's ready, there may be a foreign land in his future. "I'd love to retire in Australia. I could utilize my CDMP there as a consultant." In the meantime, he's continuing to take new and advanced courses in DM to "keep an eye on what's new and exciting."