

## Certification Provides Benefits to Professionals



*In this last of three issues profiling CDMPs and CRTWCs across Canada who received their professional designations in 2008, the Bulletin takes a look at how the role of disability management professionals has evolved since becoming certified.*

### **Alberta health region benefits from collaborative model**

Peace Country Health, based out of Grande Prairie with 4,000 employees, is currently in charge of healthcare services for the northern part of Alberta. However, the organization is in the midst of major change as all healthcare is integrating into one provincial system under the banner of Alberta Health Services.

Deborah Borden, CDMP, Disability Case Manager, has been with Peace Country Health for almost three years, and so far has not experienced any changes to the front line delivery of services. She and the organization's other disability case managers remain responsible for all employees on sick leave, STD, LTD and WCB.

She is engaged in the entire disability management process starting with the paperwork to ensure benefit payments and then moving through the stages "from early intervention to return to work planning to gainful employment."

Peace Country Health is a unionized environment so Borden's job also involves ensuring that the different union agreements come into play. This means "making sure return to work programs are formalized and having the meetings so everyone on the team knows and we can move forward."

Borden has had a long successful career in the DM field, previously spending 10 years working with the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board. Being able to earn a designation in her field has been particularly rewarding.

"There had never really been a recognized professional designation in disability management. When I saw the NIDMAR program, I was happy to finally see a recognized certification for this profession and I jumped at the opportunity."

She adds, "People don't recognize the depth of the field, so for it to be recognized as a profession is of great benefit."

Now that she has earned the CDMP designation, she sees a difference in several areas. "Not only have the rules changed since I've been practicing in this field, but now that I'm certified, I see the benefits. It used to be a medical management model rather than a consensus-based collaborative model."



She continues, “We used to wait for the doctor’s clearance before starting return to work. Now the whole role has shifted. There’s been an evolution and more professionals are driving it. Managers can see that it is much more than cost-savings. They can see the benefits of working in a supportive framework involving negotiation and consensus. They see the human-labour savings versus just the dollars.”

Another big shift she has seen over the years is that disability managers are more hands on. “They’re right there all the way with the employer, union and department heads driving the management of an illness or injury. Return to work is no longer focused on a fixed goal, but is a living, breathing process. It’s more organic and it’s much healthier for everyone in the organization.”

Her passion for the profession extends to the NIDMAR program itself. She’s taken more than half the modules and says every single one helped her. What was the biggest plus for her? “The instructors are leading edge. They’re practitioners working in the field. The courses were highly innovative, led by professionals who are the best in the field.”

She found the experiential learning from her peers to be just as invaluable, noting the online students in the courses were open about sharing their experiences, both the failures and successes.

Her conclusion: “If I was hiring someone in disability management, I would want to see them taking these courses. You can’t *not* benefit from the shared insights of other professionals across the country.”

On a personal note, Borden enjoys being involved with the Canadian Society of Professionals in Disability Management (CSPDM) and sees the international aspect of the designation as an exciting one. “The basic processes are fundamental and can be used internationally. It opens doors.”

## **Ontario firm sees DM as “just the right way to work”**

Cementation Canada Inc. is succinct about its mission, “We build mines.” The company’s projects extend from diamond mines in the Northwest Territories to the vast Sudbury Basin mines in Ontario to zinc mines in New Brunswick. With over 1,000 employees based on projects throughout North America, the company manages this work from its headquarters in North Bay and has just opened a new office in Salt Lake City. In other words, it’s a busy place to work.

Lisa Dupuis, CDMP, Senior Safety Administrator, has been with the company for two and a half years. Before that, she spent 10



years in the health and safety field, and was also an account manager at the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) in Ottawa, helping employers build return to work plans.

Her initial job at Cementation changed from assisting the Safety Department and has moved to “where my skill set and aptitude fill in the gap.” Now in disability management, she explains she is “completely hands on from the get go,” including receiving the injury investigation report right up front, tracking injuries when they happen and handling WSIB claims management.

At Cementation, early intervention is recognized as an important opportunity. “We are in touch with the worker and their family directly and with the mine and mining contractor,” she notes, adding that helping people is the best part of her job. “In disability management, I found my true passion, helping people overcome obstacles and maximize their potential.”

To validate the work she was doing, Dupuis began investigating the NIDMAR program and ran the idea past her colleagues. They told her to pursue the designation because it was “right up her alley.” Her employer supported her both financially and time-wise every step of the way.

Now as a CDMP she feels the credentials let others know she is abreast of changes in the field and says the added credibility has benefited her work with the interdisciplinary teams that involve everyone from her peers to numerous workers’ compensation boards.

Being certified under a professional code of ethics is part of that. “I’ve always chosen ethics over popular choice, but now there is a formal code that can be followed. That is important to me and my employer.”

The NIDMAR online modules prepared her well for writing the examination, which was a good thing. Last year in the same week, Dupuis ran a full marathon for the first time in her life on May 25. On May 26 she bought her first house and on May 28 she wrote the CDMP examination.

“I never felt I wasn’t going to succeed, but it was probably a good thing I was so distracted that week because I wasn’t too nervous.”

Since then, she feels her designation is well-recognized by her employer. She also sees a lot of potential to grow with a young company. “We have a chance to build a bigger, stronger disability management program for a great company. In day-to-day hands on case management, we’re already reaping the benefits.”

Another bonus is that she doesn’t have to sell the benefits of DM. “Here they’re already well-known.” As evidence of that, she cites



the words of Cementation Canada's President and Director Roy Slack, who when it comes to return to work, clearly stresses it's not about the money, "It's just the right way to work."

## Ontario municipality supports professional skill set

Sharon Lee-Chan, CDMP, Occupational Health Consultant, has been on contract with the City of Mississauga since 2007. She works in the HR division's Employee Health Services as part of a team including three occupational health nurses, herself and a manager, and a part-time medical consultant. The city has 3,500 full-time employees with 6,500 employees in all.

Lee-Chan was previously a rehabilitation consultant for close to 12 years for Sun Life. At that time she began pursuing the CDMP at the urging of her employer, who also encouraged her to take the NIDMAR modules. "Sun Life wanted highly trained, highly qualified people who could work with many different positions and employers. They wanted best practice."

Since joining the City of Mississauga, her department has rolled out a new centralized program that incorporates both DM and wellness initiatives.

"We enhanced and standardized the processes," she explains. "With all of us having different skill sets working with so many different positions at the city, I've become the person working with the more complex return to work cases. Having the CDMP has done that."

To prepare for writing the examination she was able to use her past knowledge and experience, and added to that by taking modules online. After taking a previous American-based on-the-job insurance designation, she liked the online aspect of the learning and found that because it was Canadian, it was the most applicable.

Right now she sees a lot of possibilities working with an employer whom she calls very accommodating, supportive and proactive. "I'm able to apply what I know to prevent claims, particularly in mental health areas such as stress."

She is also applying philosophies she learned in the modules to her daily work. "I used the 'Evaluating Disability Management' module to do a survey on our program." And she doesn't write-off the possibility of doing more modules as continuing professional education in the future. But for now she's extremely busy – and happy – working for an employer who is using her skills to their full potential.