



Professional designations offer mobility



IDMSC® International
Disability Management
Standards Council

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 for disability management practice worldwide.

Some of Canada's CDMPs and CRTWCs relate their personal experiences leading to a career in the disability management field and the optional labour market mobility it provides.

Career mobility a priority

Nicole MacLean wasn't thinking about occupational mobility when she completed the CDMP examination in 2012, but when she lost her position as a DM generalist with the City of Fredericton, she knew that having the added certification expanded her horizons significantly.

MacLean grew up in Saint John and after graduation, headed to the University of Toronto, where she completed a BSc in Occupational Therapy. "You are required to take the certification exam in the province where you plan to work, then maintain your provincial and national certification annually," MacLean said. "I certified in Saint John, and began working as an OT in a hospital setting."

MacLean then joined a private company as a case manager. "Our primary customers were motor vehicle insurance companies coordinating rehabilitation for their clients. That's when I started steering towards disability management," MacLean said. After the company was taken over by a US firm, MacLean left to work at several jobs, including six years at a physiotherapy clinic.

But she was determined to strike out on her own. "I started looking online to see if there were resources to help me upgrade, because my previous employers were not supportive of continuing education," MacLean said. While investigating her options, MacLean discovered the NIDMAR online program.

She opened her own practice, focused on occupational therapy and vocational rehabilitation. "I was already pretty familiar with accommodations, being an OT, but what I found really valuable was the administrative side of the DM program. There is an actual structure. It is not just commonsense problem solving. You can follow a process; you can track your process and provide a cost-benefit analysis to defend your position. It was an eye-opener for me. It made it a lot more tangible professionally."

MacLean worked at her private practice for four years, and then accepted a brand-new position with the City of Fredericton. As a DM generalist in the HR department, she handled both return to work and claims management. "Prior to that, the city didn't have anyone on staff to coordinate care or to follow up with employees after they were off work, assisting with RTW plans. That was where I came in," MacLean said.

Ironically, MacLean's position at the city was de-listed while she was recovering from a pre-approved surgery to correct a dental condition in which she administered her own early RTW plan. That left her investigating her options as an OT who is also certified in DM. "They fit together really well," MacLean said.

For MacLean and her husband, the future may lie beyond the Maritimes. "Initially my goal was just to stay current in the knowledge base and theory, just so I could be the best professional. The mobility is an added bonus," she said. "The



CDMP is opening a lot of doors for me. I find it is not very common in New Brunswick yet, so we're screening for jobs in Ontario and in the west, as well as into the States. We're like a match made in Heaven, especially for career mobility."

Case manager undertook the challenge and succeeded

As a former athlete with 15 years at the Manitoba Worker's Compensation Board, Shane Lemay doesn't shy away from a challenge. Last spring, when he was offered the chance to write the CDMP examination, he jumped at the opportunity. "I was extremely lucky. Case managers at the WCB were allowed to challenge the exam," Lemay said. "That was the longest six hours of my life, and I used it all," he said.

Lemay spent his early years in the rural north, later moving to Selkirk, just north of Winnipeg. After graduating from high school, Lemay made the decision to take a year off before entering university, with the intent of going into mathematics and engineering. He played a season of elite level baseball and then decided to pursue a career in physical education, which was subsequently re-branded as Kinesiology. His goal was to become a biomechanist, working with high-performance athletes. Lemay missed a few semesters due to financial needs and a sports injury, and did not complete the degree.

While working as a tax consultant for farm people around rural Manitoba, Lemay undertook a two-year diploma in Business Administration at Red River College, majoring in accounting. Later, when the Manitoba WCB was looking for a summer research assistant, Lemay signed on. "The financial analyst had a nurturing kind of a mind, and he recognized that I had some ambition, so he encouraged me to participate," Lemay said.

Lemay then took part in a Return to Work outcome study for the Research Division, which led to a job as a payments clerk. Later, when the financial analyst left, Lemay was invited to apply for the job. "They gave me the tap and asked if I would like to fill his shoes. The timing was right; I had by then finished my diploma and I slid into his job and did it for five years," Lemay said.

Following that, Lemay moved into case management, where he has remained for seven years. While he has no immediate plans to change career directions, he believes adding a CDMP to his resume widens his horizons beyond the financial / analytical path he has followed thus far.

"My future might be policy. If it is, then having professional certification in DM would strengthen my position in applying for something in that field," he said. "When you get into broader public policy, you are competing against MBAs and Master's in Public Administration, so I see having the CDMP professional designation as rounding me out." Lemay said the certification would also open up opportunities in the private sector, either with a DM service provider or in the corporate sector. "Either way, I think my position is much stronger with the CDMP," he said.