

## Certified Professionals Find Job Fulfillment



*After writing the professional certification examinations in May 2009, 59 individuals from across Canada successfully passed and achieved the designations of CRTWC and CDMP. In this first of a series, the Bulletin talks to Canada's newly certified professionals about what motivates them, how being certified makes a difference in their careers, and what they're planning for the future. Speaking to four certified professionals in a variety of jobs and sectors, one common denominator was clear: they all love their jobs.*

### Multi-faceted New Brunswick organization has comprehensive DM program

Bonnie Murray, CDMP, Disability Manager with J.D. Irving Limited, has worked in their head office in Saint John, NB for about two years. Prior to that, she spent 10 years with Weyerhaeuser, the last three serving as a return to work coordinator and HR generalist in their HR department. Today, she and two other staff members handle disability management on behalf of J.D. Irving's Forestry & Forest Services division, including sawmill and woodlands operations, Irving Pulp & Paper, Irving Paper, Irving Tissue Company and Lake Utopia Paper. In other words, it's a big job within a large, diverse organization. At any one time, she and the DM staff are involved in about 140 claims, some highly complex or long-term.

Murray brings a lot of knowledge and skill to her position. She holds a Certificate in Business Administration from the University of New Brunswick and also spent a year obtaining the Human Resources Management Professional Development Certificate. She was motivated to go for the CDMP by a former colleague at Weyerhaeuser, who invited her to a meeting of return to work coordinators where she learned about NIDMAR's collaborative approach.

Murray has since completed the 25 NIDMAR training modules. She found a lot of value in the module on unions as she "gets to work with both sides at J.D. Irving." She also gained from the benefits module as it applied directly to her job managing claims. "They were all good," she explains, "but the most difficult for me was assistive devices. It's something we don't deal with every day. It was quite a challenge." Ironically, she did well on that module.

When she applied for her current job at J.D. Irving, the NIDMAR modules were a huge selling point. Murray recalls, "I was virtually hired on the spot. They knew I was already trained." And although she had to write the examination twice – the first time she was coping with a new job and a move to a new house – she successfully passed in May 2009. "It was a difficult exam," she concedes.

The pay-off has been well worth it. "I feel now that I have the designation, I have more confidence talking to HR people and managers. I don't get the same arguments." She is also proud to be part of what she calls a wonderful DM program. "Here at J.D. Irving we do a fabulous job of managing our claims. We work with two doctors, who are very professional and explain what certain medical terms mean. They help tremendously with complex claims. They'll get on the phone directly with insurance companies."

The company also has a comprehensive DM reporting system that issues trend analysis reports, which are presented to senior





management, tracks top injury causes and flags claims according to set criteria. In other words, she adds enthusiastically, "We don't let claims linger out there in 'la la land'!"

Murray thoroughly enjoys her job and is always involved in some form of continuing education or professional development. Her next challenge? She's just one course away from earning a certificate in French.

### **DM role evolves at Nova Scotia regional municipality**

Mildred Howse, CRTWC, Workers' Compensation Claims Coordinator, has spent 17 years with the Halifax Regional Municipality working in administrative roles in governance, finance, information technology and human resources. Already armed with certificates in Business Management and Information Technology Solutions, Howse was pleased to take on the role as the municipality's first Workers' Compensation Claims Coordinator.

Of the new role, she says, "It's always evolving. There are challenges and growing pains, but I love my job!" She says she is always trying to fine tune as she goes, particularly because of the caseload. Three staff members handle absence-related issues for approximately 4,500 employees.

She triages all WCB claims made by employees, along with reporting, auditing and other administrative duties. Her current portfolio includes case management and preparing return to work plans for claims of two weeks' duration or less. Above that, or for more complex cases, the files are referred to another health consultant. It is her job, as well, to ensure all WCB benefits are paid appropriately.

Howse also prepares written submissions for claims on appeal to the WCB Internal Appeals Department, as well as participates and represents the employer at oral hearings. Appeals before the Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal (WCAT) involves working with the municipality's own legal experts.

With all the various projects she had previously worked on at the Halifax Regional Municipality, Howse was encouraged by her manager and director to consider the Disability Case Management field and supported her in her interest in pursuing the NIDMAR modules.

She found all the modules to be of interest, in particular the WCB module because, "That's where my interest lies. I found them even more interesting when studying for the exam. After having worked in the field, the modules make sense." She also liked the web-based aspect of the NIDMAR program. "It allowed me to work, raise my children and further my career. It was perfect for me."

Now that she has obtained the CRTWC designation, she has an added confidence level in her new job, which she has largely self-defined. "No one knew really what this job would look like.



I've crafted this position based on the work I was doing and using every and any external resource I could find."

What's next? Howse envisions becoming a WCB specialist. She has a goal as well to eventually sit for the Certified Human Resources Professional exam and to add the CHRP designation to her growing professional credentials.

### **CRTWC benefits from additional DM training at House of Commons, Ottawa**

Jeanne Laflamme, CRTWC, Advisor, Occupational Health, Safety & Environment and Claims Management, House of Commons, Ottawa, has been an employee in the government sector for 35 years. Her previous education includes certification in health and safety in the workplace and in ergonomics. She currently coordinates WCB claims, including return to work and follow-up. Another aspect of her job is related to health and safety, which involves training and workplace inspection.

To assist with her duties, Laflamme had been asking her manager for additional training that would add to her credibility on the job. NIDMAR was recommended. She has completed almost all of the NIDMAR modules, which she says "make such a difference." She particularly enjoyed the modules on management and organizational skills for return to work and disability management from a human resources perspective.

She enjoys the rapport she has working with clients. "I like the interaction with them when planning their return to work program."

Of her own career, she is pleased to have gained the CRTWC and may go for the CDMP next year, since she has completed most of the modules. In the meantime, she truly enjoys her job.

### **Designations support social policy at Federal Workers Compensation Service, Labour Program HRSDC, Ottawa**

Christine Sakiris, CDMP, Policy Analyst, Federal Workers Compensation Service, Labour Program HRSDC, Ottawa, is a lawyer (LL.B., B.C.L.) and certified mediator. She was hired as a program advisor at the Federal Workers Compensation Service, Labour Program (HRSDC) four and a half years ago; her title was changed to policy analyst in April 2009. Along with becoming a CDMP, she is also a Certified CBDMA Auditor.

Sakiris became involved in disability management through a long-held interest in social policy work, in particular, labour and employment issues. "Through my experiences as a lawyer and later as an adjudicator with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (Ontario), I had the opportunity to view issues such as job security, occupational health and safety, and return to work planning from different perspectives."

She adds, "I derived a great deal of satisfaction as an adjudicator from assisting employers and employees in the return to work

process. In 2006-2007, the Labour Program was conducting research and raising awareness on a departmental level, of the need for comprehensive disability management programs.“ According to Sakiris, this fit well within the mandate of the Labour Program, as the administrator of the *Government Employees Compensation Act* (GECA). GECA is the enabling legislation through which federal government employees are provided with compensation for occupational injuries and illnesses.

When the Labour Program obtained the NIDMAR license to use the CBDMA audit tools, Sakiris was chosen to participate in the NIDMAR auditor training, which includes achieving the CDMP designation.

“The NIDMAR curriculum allowed me to see how the component ‘pieces’ of disability management (e.g. occupational health and safety, insurance carriers, duty to accommodate), which are so often operating in silos, fit together within a disability management program. I also appreciated the holistic approach to the subject matter. Each issue was examined from the perspective of several stakeholders.“ She found modules in mental health issues, rehabilitation and return to work to be the most illuminating.

“In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of the prevalence of chronic stress or other mental health issues. However it can be difficult for an employer to know how to assist an employee, or how to offer accommodations in order for them to remain at or return to work. The module on mental health issues provided concrete strategies for accommodating an employee in a respectful and supportive manner.“

Sakiris advises that certification as a CDMP and CBDMA Auditor has been essential to her work.“ The NIDMAR program has enabled me to more clearly articulate the ‘big picture’ view of how a DM program should be structured. It has also provided me with a better understanding of how to support each component of a program.“

She notes this has been invaluable in effectively performing audits of DM programs and assisting organizations that are in the early stages of drafting DM policies and developing programs.

Increasingly, the Labour Program has been involved in collaborating with federal departments and agencies in promoting best practices in DM, as well as supporting DM initiatives within the federal government. Sakiris sees the CDMP designation as a platform from which to build on this work.

When it comes to best practices she believes, “The involvement of the ILO in the development of the CBDMA tools lends credibility to the CBDMA and the CDMP designations.”