

DM Professionals Offer Added Insight on DM Issues



After writing the professional certification examinations in May 2009, 59 individuals from across Canada successfully achieved the CRTWC and CDMP designations. In this last in 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.



Disability management experience transported to power-generation sector

Kellie Cowling, CDMP, has spent 15 years in health, safety and compensation. She recently accepted a new position with Ontario Power Generation–Pickering Nuclear in Pickering, ON as a technical engineer in the Conventional Safety Department. Previously, she had been employed with Collins & Aikman, an automotive parts manufacturer and, before that, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

She was hired as a disability management coordinator for Collins & Aikman Automotive to deal primarily with attendance management, WSIB and return to work coordination. The position had been open for some time and she was hired to re-focus the disability management program and strengthen the working relationships between the union, employer and workers. Originally, the experience was new and often "trying". She sought assistance from NIDMAR through publications about industrial success stories and how to establish effective joint disability management programs.

She later accepted roles in health, safety and environment, eventually leading to a multi-functional role that encompassed all the disciplines. She notes the first several years were focused on establishing a program and learning what worked and why. "Having a broad background in safety, ergonomics, etc., was certainly helpful, providing a framework for knowing how small changes could improve the working environment and accommodate workers more successfully."

Over the course of 10 years at the automotive company, she says, "It was very satisfying to see how the relationship evolved with the employees, union, supervisors and management to the point of mutual respect and trust in the disability management process."

Today, Cowling brings a BSc (Hons) and two-year diploma in Occupation Health and Safety to her new job. She also obtained her designation as a Canadian Registered Safety Professional (CRSP) before moving on to pursue the CDMP.

After spending more than a decade dealing with disability management issues in her previous job, Cowling saw certification as the next logical step to further her professional accreditations in combination with the CRSP designation. She supplemented her experience through NIDMAR's course materials before successfully writing the CDMP examination in 2009.



The bonus: "Being certified certainly allows my experiences to be highlighted in a more positive and professional manner when dealing with clients and managers."

Her next goal: adding to her considerable credentials by gaining Human Resources certification.

"Mix of issues" presents myriad of challenges

Charlotte Kolody, CRTWC, is a return to work coordinator for a provider of rehabilitation and return to work consulting services in Winnipeg, MB.

She's been with the company, Independence Incorporated, since July 2009 and prior to that had 12 years experience in the field of return to work. Most recently, she spent two and a half years in the agri-business sector, where most of the cases she saw dealt with physical injuries including backs, knees, shoulders and cuts. While she did encounter cases involving cancer, heart disease, hearing loss and some psychological issues, she notes, "We didn't see the fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue cases."

In her current casework, she handles case management and return to work in consultation with insurance companies and employers, primarily companies, and government departments. Of her case load today, she says, "We're seeing a lot of combinations of medical issues with performance issues, psychological issues and attendance issues, such as not reporting to supervisors. It's hard when you have such a mix of issues."

She has taken nearly all the NIDMAR modules and credits the CRTWC for helping her deal with her job's myriad mix of challenges by giving her a broader understanding. "The course helped me look more globally, rather than just with an adjudicating point of view. It helps." It also helped that her employer was highly supportive in her quest to become certified.

As a result, Kolody has gained a few things, explaining that evaluating the effectiveness of the organization's program is a new focus. "One module asked us to make a checklist for quick reference asking questions like 'Are you cost effective?' Now we're using some of that."

She also gained a different perspective on medical and physical disabilities from the modules, including different factors that might impact on accommodations. "I thought I knew from my research, but was surprised, especially with return to work, with all the things to consider in terms of the environment."

Overall, she's impressed with how the field has evolved in the last 12 years that she's been involved. "It's unreal. We used to learn on the job. There were no programs. Now, there are more and more people doing the NIDMAR courses."



Of her own career aspirations, she says that she has done adjudication, is currently doing return to work, and would like to move more into the disability management side in the future. “I like the broader spectrum of DM and I’m looking forward to adding more specialities.”

So what’s next for her? Although she’s still debating if and when she might pursue the CDMP designation, Kolody says it’s a distinct possibility. “I’m psyching up to write the examination.”

Occupational Health Nurse enjoys part-time job in DM – after retirement

Deborah Federko, CDMP, retired from her previous eight-year job as a return to work consultant with the Saskatoon Health Region in December 2008. A registered nurse, occupational health nurse and trained agent for the Employee Assistance Program, she was lured out of retirement in January 2009 to work part-time as a health and wellness consultant at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, SK.

She was encouraged by her boss at the University to challenge the CDMP exam last year based on her years of experience. To that, she added educational study to get caught up on new legislation and other ongoing developments in the field. “I had to go back to refresh on codes, no doubt about it,” she says.

Supplemented by the studying, she found the exam applied a lot of common sense gained through hands-on experience and, overall, found writing the exam to be extremely beneficial. “It’s provided confidence that I’ve done this and has supported my background to date.”

While right now she calls herself a “busy grandma” since she recently became the proud grandmother of twins, Federko is still heavily involved with the Canadian Occupational Health Nurses Association and finds part-time work ideally suited for her.

At the University of Saskatchewan, her job focuses on “stay at work” through accommodations in the workplace, as well as through return to work programs and attendance support. She works on an integrated model, involving employee assistance counselors, the Human Resources and Health and Wellness departments, the manager and the employee. Her work-related cases involve a range of medical issues, including psychological impairments and sensitive performance issues, such as employee attendance. Part of the process, she says, is to “assess and be proactive.”

While Federko puts a high premium on experience, she also believes, “The CDMP, and the education that comes with it, is an excellent base to develop skills. I think it’s a wonderful program.”