



PHOTO: The first group of students completing the 25 NIDMAR disability management modules in Belgium attended a celebration in their honour on November 23 in Brussels.

Disability Management Professionals in Belgium Embrace NIDMAR Training and IDMSC Designations



In June 2014, the National Institute of Disability Management and Research (NIDMAR) signed a license agreement with the Belgium Health Insurance Agency, RIZIV-INAMI, which manages supplemental security income (SSI) benefits for non-occupational injuries and illnesses for the country's more than 11 million people.

The agreement allowed the agency to begin training individuals under its own "Back to Work" program, using the NIDMAR curriculum and the International Disability Management Standard Council's designations. Three years later, 42 participants wrote the examinations to become a Certified Return to Work Coordinator (CRTWC) or a Certified Disability Management Professional (CDMP).

In the three intervening years, considerable work was done to prepare the way for individuals working in the disability management field to write the certification examinations. Throughout 2015 and 2016, a consortium of universities, knowledge and research institutes, and occupational health services was established to bring together sickness absence and return to work expertise in Belgium. The consortium, under the leadership of Prof. dr. Lode Godderis and Dr. Marie-Claire Lambrechts (KU Leuven Centre for Environment and Health), adapted and updated the NIDMAR training program to the Belgian context. Each of the 25 modules and all course documentation was developed in Dutch and French, the two official languages in Belgium.

The modules were taught on site commencing in 2016. According to Prof. Godderis and Dr. Lambrechts, "one of the key success factors of this first-year program was the close follow-up and interaction between Dr. Saskia Decuman, Dr. Laurence Paquier and Mr. François Perl from the National Institute of Health and Disability Insurance (NIHDI), the students, and the consortium. Every module was thoroughly assessed after the modifications by the consortium coordinator and NIHDI. Then, after each training session,



the module was evaluated by the students, and the trainers took any necessary action as a follow-up," they said.

Two of the trainers, Katrien Bruninckx and Marthe Verjans, who worked together on the two introductory modules, said they found the material to be "universal and workable. The NIDMAR concept ensures that absenteeism and reintegration are placed in a broader context, and provided a common language for individuals in different disciplines to take on their role in return to work coordination. About 15 years ago we had the opportunity to participate in early projects that translated the NIDMAR concept for the Belgian context. Our recent experience facilitating this training was very pleasant."

Once the training was complete, the students then prepared to write either the CRTWC or the CDMP seven-hour certification examination. This November, a ceremony was held in Brussels for the 55 students who completed the training. In addition to receiving their Certificate of Completion, 18 students received their CRTWC certificates and 7 received their CDMP certificates.

Guest speakers at the ceremony included François Perl, Director General of the Department of Benefits of the NIHDI, Vice-chair of Rehabilitation International, and Board Member of the International Disability Management Standards Council; and Wolfgang Zimmermann, Executive Director of NIDMAR and President of the Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences. The ceremony was attended by other personnel from NIHDI and some of the teachers who facilitated the modules.

Feedback from three students

Following the ceremony, three of the students were asked what the training and certification meant to them. Here are their responses:

Florence Wolfs, advising paramedical for a social insurance company and now a CRTWC said, "The disability management courses gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in guiding and advising people who are deemed not fit to work. As an occupational therapist, I try to reach an optimal fit between the person, his/her capacities, and his/her environment. However, I lacked the knowledge and tools to apply this in the setting of work disability and return to work. With the courses, I had access to a great pool of knowledge, and I could learn from my co-students. I gained knowledge in practical cases and expanded my knowledge of legislation. Within my institution, I have become the contact person about work resumption and my colleagues often refer people to me. Obtaining the professional designation makes me more confident in my work, means my advice is taken into consideration, and I can present myself more clearly to others."

Dr Elisabeth Pête, who works as an occupational physician for an external service for prevention and protection, and is now a CDMP said, "The curriculum was an opportunity for me to expand my horizons in job retention and return to work strategies, to gain a fresh perspective in my own field – well-being in the workplace, and to acquaint myself with the work of professionals from various other fields and disciplines. I found the whole process highly rewarding as a professional and as an individual."

Dr Pête went on to say she believes there needs to be a new way of working; "one that will engage every relevant stakeholder in a common effort towards return to work. In my opinion, one way of achieving this is through education, training, and feedback on field experiences. That is why, as an occupational physician belonging to an external service provider for prevention and protection at work, I am devoted to educating and training our own doctors and teams, as well as developing tools and arguments to raise awareness among employers. With this in mind, I will be collaborating with a team from NIHDI to set up an 'alumni peer group',



aiming to encourage continued education in the field of disability management and to provide former students with a place to share our experiences.”

Another student, Dr Jean-Philippe Vaisier, a medical adviser for a social insurance company and now a CRTWC, said that when he heard about the training being offered by NIHDI, he wanted to do it. “My main goals were to build upon what I have learned in the field, meet people working in the same field, and establish a network. The training met my expectations. I was especially pleased to be able to understand the whole process of return to work, because in my daily practice, I was not so familiar with the corporate world. I hope to participate in the development in Belgium of these new occupations, CRTWC and CDMF.

On a final note, Dr. Decuman, project leader for disability management for NIHDI, says that going forward in the coming years, “we want to further develop the curriculum with the consortium, develop our criteria for recertification, and offer, on a regular basis, training for the students (e.g. we organized a free course on *Individual Placement and Support*). We will also assess what the possibilities are for distance learning. As reintegration will more and more be the standard, and with new legislation supporting that, we want to give our stakeholders the necessary tools to continuously develop themselves. Also, looking ahead, RIZIV-INAMI will be hosting IFDM 2020 in Brussels, Belgium, so we are looking forward to that.”

For further information on the professional certification, please visit the NIDMAR website at: www.nidmar.ca

For information on the education program referenced, please visit the following website: <https://www.pcu-whs.ca/programs/continuing-professional-education/dmpc-program/>

For further information on the offerings of training and certification in Belgium, please contact Dr. Saskia Decuman at: saskia.decuman@riziv.fgov.be