

Certified Disability Management Professional (CDMP) Certified Return to Work Coordinator (CRTWC)

The Global Gold Standard in Return to Work and Disability Management Certification

Context

Development of these certifications and the underlying *Occupational Standards* was a multi-stakeholder, pan-Canadian effort involving federal and provincial governments, employers, unions, workers compensation boards and service/rehabilitation providers who, in conjunction with and the supervision of the Occupational Standards Branch at Employment and Social Development Canada, embarked on this two-year ambitious initiative, commencing in 1998.

Supported through a multi-national senior CEO leadership team, and building on a related seven-country United Nations' ILO research initiative, this \$2 million effort succeeded in defining the critical skills and competencies required in significantly improving the socio-economic return to work outcomes for injured and disabled workers, while at the same time reducing disability-related costs for employers and society as a whole.

Following completion of the *Occupational Standards* through a senior level academic leadership team, and subsequent to formal endorsement from a broad cross-section of Canadian employers, unions, WCB's and other relevant stakeholders, development of psychometrically stable and legally defensible examinations through an independent test agency, leading to either the CDMP or CRTWC designations, commenced with the first examinations taking place across Canada and Germany in 2003.

The 300 question exam, administered over a 7 hour, one-day time frame, is administered through the International Disability Management Standards Council which brings together 64 countries where the designations are now licensed, and is tasked with ensuring that, much like other international professional designations, a consistent approach towards all aspects of the introduction and administration is maintained while coordinating a continuous improvement strategy.

Like most critical health care designations, e.g. MD, PT, OT, RN, OHN, etc., where client-specific outcomes are expected, and in the case of the CDMP and CRTWC, it is the continued employment participation of individuals who acquire a mental or physical health impairment which threatens the employment relationship, the CDMP or CRTWC designation cannot be obtained through a grandfathering process, but must be achieved through the successful passing of the respective examinations, thus ensuring a high and consistent level of professional functioning, irrespective of international jurisdiction.

Referenced in the United Nations ISSA best practice Guidelines on Return to Work and Reintegration, the CDMP and CRTWC examinations are administered by independent, recognized test agencies in each of the jurisdictions.

Both the Scottish and Belgian Governments completed "value for money" audits and both results showed the very positive outcomes that the upskilling to the CDMP professional level of case managers responsible for maintaining and returning workers to meaningful employment had in each of their jurisdictions, that they both have extended their license agreements for the education and certification to 2025, with Scotland's goal to train 300 case managers and Belgium training 90 individuals each year.

The steps in creating a professional designation include the following:

1. Development of Occupational Standards

The first step in creating professional standards requires the development of Occupational Standards that identify the critical competency areas for those who work in the field.

This was the process that was undertaken by NIDMAR, following Government of Canada Guidelines, for the development of the *Occupational Standards in Disability Management*. To oversee the process, a committee was created consisting of well-seasoned professionals and practitioners who represented key stakeholder groups including: employer, labour, government, workers compensation, private insurance, service/rehabilitation providers, organizations of people with disabilities, and who represented all regions of Canada, who compiled the first draft of the Standards.

The draft was distributed for feedback right across Canada to employers, labour organizations, government, workers compensation boards, private insurers, service/rehabilitation providers, and organizations of people with disabilities. Additionally, it was presented at two public conferences for audience feedback. All responses were reviewed in detail and the *Occupational Standards* were finalized, published and distributed.

2. Development of Certification Examination to meet the Occupational Standards

The next step is to create professional certification examinations to meet the *Occupational Standards*.

NIDMAR undertook this next process by working with a reputable test agency, which had over 30 years experience in the development of psychometrically stable and legally defensible certification examinations, and had worked with over 50 organizations to deliver professional certification examinations, including the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons. Test agency experts have graduate and post-graduate degrees in statistics and development of test instruments.

Working with the test agency, and following Government of Canada Guidelines, in addition to the *Standards and Guidelines for Educational and Psychological Testing*, and the National Organization for Competency Assurance *Certification Handbook*, the process included representatives from the key stakeholder groups mentioned above, an Examination Committee was created along with groups of subject matter experts trained by test agency experts. To demonstrate the appropriateness of each multiple choice item developed, each was referenced by one current disability management textbook.

Additionally, all test items were submitted to an editorial review by the test agency to ensure consistency of language, terminology and grammar. An independent review took place of all items by experts in the field. The multiple choice examinations are compiled from items in the item bank in accordance with the blueprint specifications. The Examination Committee established the standards using the modified Angoff procedure, a professionally accepted and widely used method for setting the standard for criterion-referenced examinations.

3. Process Meets an ISO Standard

The International Standards Organization (ISO) developed an international standard for professional certifications, ISO 17024 Standard, and the test agency reviewed the methods adopted by NIDMAR for the development and maintenance of the certification examinations and determined that they meet, and in many cases, exceed the ISO Standard.

4. Eligibility Qualifications to Write the Examinations

Eligibility qualifications to write the examinations are published on websites and in Policy and Procedures documents. This requires providing proof of having completed both education in the field and relevant work experience.

Due to the serious nature of this field of practice – and what it means to the individual who has incurred a disabling condition – as to whether or not they are able to return to the workforce – simply grandfathering of individuals who may have worked in the field by just providing them with a designation, has never been part of a best practice process, and does a disservice to those individuals who require the expertise of an accountable professional to assist them in staying at work or returning to work.

Undertaking current education in the competency areas identified in the *Occupational Standards* is crucial to understanding this complex field of practice and remaining relevant, along with performing the roles and responsibilities in the delivery of disability management / return to work services is required in order to be eligible to write the examinations.

5. In Summary

The above rigorous process cost approximately \$2 million CAD – it is an expensive process to undertake the development of professional certification examinations – ones that meet Canadian Government and internationally recognized standards.

The development of professional standards is not taken lightly by NIDMAR, or by its international partners that have followed the above process. These professional standards have now been adopted in 64 countries to date and have been cited in United Nations best practice Guidelines on Return to Work and Reintegration.

The Canadian Society of Professionals in Disability Management is the supporting body to the following professional designations:

- **Certified Disability Management Professional (CDMP)**
- **Certified Return to Work Coordinator (CRTWC)**

These designations are the global best practice, internationally recognized and adopted professional standards for those working in the field of Disability Management and Return to Work. And in working through the International Disability Management Standards Council, we ensure ongoing commitment and innovation in the advancement of global disability management best practices and policies.