



NIDMAR's DM protocol goes to Ireland



Foreground: Ashley Balbirnie (left), chief executive, Gandon Enterprises and Wolfgang Zimmermann, executive director, NIDMAR.

Back row, from left: Ian Elliott, marketing manager; Hugh Cassidy, program development officer; Terry Fahy, project director; Kimberly Fitzgerald, employee assistance coordinator (all from Gandon Enterprises); and Joyce Gravelle, NIDMAR assistant executive director.

DUBLIN, IRELAND: The most recent organization to embrace the NIDMAR audit tool, disability management curriculum and professional designations is Gandon Enterprises. Gandon is a subsidiary of the Rehab Group, an independent, not-for-profit organization that provides training, employment, social care and commercial services for some 60,000 people each year in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Gandon operates a 50-50 employment policy between disabled and able-bodied employees in a workforce of over 450 people.

"Disability management in Ireland is in its infancy with many Irish businesses not realizing the importance to the real business case for managing this part of their strategy," says Ashley Balbirnie, Gandon's chief executive.

Not realizing its importance is perhaps not surprising, in a country where no overall policy framework or coherent system approach to disability management exists.

Despite the lack of system support for disability management in Ireland, many positive campaigners are engaged constructively with the issue of long-term absence, disability and return to work.

"Some companies, such as Hewlett Packard and Xerox, have put in place comprehensive disability management policies and processes," says Dr. Donal McAnaney, director of the Rehab Group's department of research, innovation and business excellence.

But these companies are exceptions to the rule. One of the main difficulties for Irish companies is a lack of disability management knowledge. This will change, with the NIDMAR curriculum and professional designations.

"The curriculum will equip Irish professionals with the skills and abilities to operate, deliver and assist the return to work process, enabling knowledge and expertise to be retained within the company," says Terry Fahy, general manager of Gandon Enterprises' Access Ability program.

"The NIDMAR audit tool and curriculum provide Access Ability and positive Irish employers with the tools required to build system capacity to respond more effectively to people at risk of losing their jobs as a result of illness or disability," says Dr. McAnaney. "I believe that the time has come for the proper recognition of disability management as a strategy to increase the number of disabled people in work."

Grounded in international best practice research, and incorporating the core value components of the International Labour Organization's *Code of practice on managing disability in the workplace*, the NIDMAR approach provides well-recognized standards and credentials to disability management in Ireland.

"Access Ability, in partnership with NIDMAR, hopes to bring this management strategy to the forefront of Irish business," says Balbirnie. ■