



International leadership and expertise benefits NIDMAR Board



Joachim Breuer



Judy Geary

NIDMAR is pleased to announce the appointment of two new directors to the Board. Joachim Breuer, PhD, Director General of Deutsch Gesetzliche Unfallversicherung (DGUV), Germany has accepted the newly created role of International Director and Judy Geary, Vice-President, Policy and Program Development for the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) of Ontario has signed on as a Director of the Board. Here's more on the impressive leadership skills and large scale institutional expertise these two new directors bring to the future of NIDMAR.

When NIDMAR's Executive Director, Wolfgang Zimmermann, was in Germany in 2003 speaking at a conference on disability management (DM), he couldn't have predicted the profound effect his words would have over the five-plus years that followed.

Dr. Joachim Breuer was in the audience at the time and was impressed with NIDMAR's approach to DM and, calling it a "fantastic idea," saw that it fit with the vision of the DGUV (the social accident insurance body for Germany, formerly known as the HVBG). Dr. Breuer had just taken over as chief executive officer of the DGUV and wasted no time in adopting NIDMAR's principal tenets. Six months after meeting Wolfgang, he signed a landmark agreement with NIDMAR, and December 2007 marked the fifth anniversary that the DGUV has been licensed to award the professional CDMP and CRTWC designations across Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Germany now leads with the highest number of certified individuals in the field of disability management. To date, there are over 600 CDMPs in Germany. Last year, the DGUV offered the CRTWC examination for the first time and 14 individuals achieved this designation, with more expected this year. Germany will offer two examination sittings this year, which will be expanded to three, based on demand.

But as Dr. Breuer explains, it was not easy getting out of the starting gate. "We have a history in Germany of more than 100 years of dealing with disability management and return to work. People in the field were convinced of the quality of the work and questioned, 'Why should we take this over when we have our own programs?'" Faced with this initial resistance, he notes the first 50 people who wrote the examinations were the hardest to



get. Fortunately, acceptance has progressed quickly from there with more and more people sitting for the professional examinations each year.

“The good quality of the NIDMAR program has brought us to the next level. We’re at the point of breaking through where we can add to the success with our own expertise now.”

He advises that of the 600 CDMPs in Germany, almost 80 percent come from within the ranks of the DGUV with the other 20 percent coming from other social insurance organizations, pension and health insurers, and others.

“NIDMAR opened the way for disability management to take an economic role. The German accident insurance was the key organization to take the lead and our next big step is to convince more companies of the value of the designations, so we do not have CDMPs only from the social security side, but also from the company side,” Dr. Breuer stresses.

He sees two main avenues for this growth to take place: through individuals from within companies and businesses, and by integrating disability management with the country’s unemployment insurance scheme.

Along with his strong vision and ambitious plans to increase DM across Germany, Dr. Breuer also hopes to make an impact during his term as NIDMAR’s new international director. He believes it is a chance to learn how Canada is performing and meeting challenges in DM, while bringing his own experiences from Germany to the table.

But overall he was motivated to accept the position in light of the Institute’s plans to establish an international university in the field of workplace health sciences.

“The university is a jewel that NIDMAR will create by developing a science of disability management and bringing scientific principles of study to this field. If Canada doesn’t do it here, other countries will do it instead.”

The Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences Bill, proposed and advocated by NIDMAR, passed unanimously in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia on May 14, 2007 and the legislation came into force on July 19, 2007.

Dr. Breuer considers it an honour and fulfillment of a dream to have the chance to see the university established. During his time on the Board, his vision is that there will be a building housing the university, there will be students starting out, and there will be professors able to bring the ideas of disability management forward on a scientific platform.

He sees success as depending on “the right idea coming to the right people from the right professors – with 1,000 steps in between to get there.”

With Dr. Breuer now on the NIDMAR Board, it’s likely the planned Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences is already many steps closer to reality.

Benefiting from the Ontario WSIB’s leadership and influence in Canada

With almost 13 million people and close to 40 percent of Canada’s population, Ontario carries more weight than any other province or territory in Canada. As the administrator of 340,000 worker claims a year and with a workforce of 4,500 employees, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) possesses tremendous clout as a leader for social policy and change in the fields of health and safety, and return to work.

The WSIB is already taking the lead on the prevention side of the equation and this year launched an innovative and ambitious social marketing campaign called “The Road to Zero.” Setting out to “dispel the myth that workplace accidents actually exist” the WSIB’s goal is to change the way people think and to set Ontario on the path to having the “safest workplaces in the world.”

Judy Geary, Vice-President, Policy and Program Development, confirms that “leading is part of the WSIB’s mission.” Currently, she explains, the Ontario Board is also in the process of revamping its service delivery with emphasis on return to work, disability management and disability prevention.

The timing for the new approach coincides with a significant issue facing the WSIB. “We’re grappling with a paradoxical situation in that Ontario’s lost-time rate has dropped, but return to work outcomes for those injured are poorer. More people are not returning comparatively on a historical basis. This is a troubling trend for us.”

To turn this challenge around, the WSIB is seeking “dramatic transformational change,” says Geary, through investing in return to work and strengthening its focus on case management. As the new DM programs proceed, she hopes to be able to share much of what the Ontario Board learns from an evidence-based perspective with other jurisdictions in Canada and internationally.

Geary is equally as interested in sharing information as she is in learning from others’ experiences. She was first introduced to NIDMAR in 2002 when Wolfgang Zimmermann asked her to

speak at the 1st International Forum on Disability Management in Vancouver that year. She's been actively involved with the organization since and, along with her appointment to the Board of Directors this year, is also a member of the International Disability Management Standards Council. It is NIDMAR's international platform that intrigues her most.

“The WSIB is interested in understanding what is going on around the world. A big strength of NIDMAR is the international aspect,” she explains. She also looks forward to working with new director Joachim Breuer, “Germany historically has been a model for Canada to follow.”

During her tenure on the Board, Geary plans to contribute to the research agenda and provide support for research projects. In that vein, she considers the creation of the new university to be significant, “It's a tremendously impressive and exciting development for the health and safety and disability management fields.”

She expects her time on the Board will be very much a two-way street allowing her to build a professional network she can leverage on behalf of the WSIB, and allowing her to gain expertise from other Board members, “smart, knowledgeable people with diverse backgrounds and experiences.”

For her part, Geary hopes to contribute some of Ontario's weight and leadership as NIDMAR moves forward in its “socially critical work” on behalf of disabled workers in Canada and internationally.