



## Federal Fact-Finding Mission Culminates With Visit to NIDMAR and PCU-WHS



*Photo L to R: Cathy McLeod, Member of Parliament for Kamloops-Thompson-Cariboo; Wolfgang Zimmermann, President of PCU-WHS and Executive Director of NIDMAR; and Kin Choi, Assistant Deputy Minister.*

The Parliamentary Secretary to the federal Minister of Labour paid a visit to the Port Alberni campus of PCU-WHS on September 9.

Cathy McLeod, Member of Parliament for Kamloops-Thompson-Cariboo, has undertaken a study of workplace health policies and practices across Canada on behalf of Labour Minister Dr. Kellie Leitch. She was accompanied by Assistant Deputy Minister, Mr. Kin Choi, who also serves as Chairman of the Board of Governors for the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety.

"I've met with a number of the WCBs, I've been to round tables, met with some of the academics from SFU and UBC, with the Canadian Mental Health Commission – one of my priorities has been around mental health – and it was always said that I had to come here," McLeod said.

Labour Minister Leitch, who is a practicing pediatric orthopedic surgeon, was appointed to the post in July 2013. "I have a nursing background, so we come to this portfolio with perhaps a little different background," McLeod said.

The MP's visit came just one day after the formal launching of degree program instruction by the University. PCU-WHS Vice President Academic, Dr. Lynn Shaw, provided the MP with a summary of the Bachelor of Disability Management curriculum and plans for future degree programs.

McLeod said her visit to NIDMAR and PCU-WHS was a reminder that while mental health issues are critical, her ministry must maintain a focus on the full spectrum of workplace health concerns. She feels the University could take on a major role in coordinating the efforts of employers and governments as they seek to improve their delivery of services to workers and reduce the financial burden of workplace injury and illness.

"Sometimes I think what we have is wonderful things happening in silos that different people don't know about, even in Canada," she said. "What is needed is someone to put all those pieces together."

"For example, I know the Canadian Mental Health Association does a marvelous job in supporting people with mental health issues. But I had no idea they also do some very good programming in [workplace health] and creating a supportive environment. So how does this all connect while you're building your education modules? I see you as a big connector in taking in all those pieces."

For the past 10 years, the Labour Ministry has used the Disability Management program assessment protocol developed by NIDMAR to assess workplace hazards, including mental health, across a range of government departments and agencies.





ADM Choi said the ministry would like to certify more employees in the use of the assessment protocol, despite the difficulty in freeing up significant numbers of experienced employees to undertake the six-week training program.

“I am optimistic and certainly committed to investing more of our folks to this. I think it is the model. We have a federal worker’s compensation program that is a \$160 million program, and we have been working at changing the way we manage that program.”

Part of that means channeling better services to those organizations that generate the highest caseloads, in order to bring down the illness and injury rates and ultimately, the costs.

“My model is to get our ‘top’ clients (by case volume) to become our ‘best’ clients,” he said. “You have to step back and say, ‘Where are all these files coming from? Why are they coming from that organization and what can we do to intervene to prevent more?’ I see the assessment tool as enhancing that, and a way for us to focus on what we need to do for interventions.”

PCU-WHS President and NIDMAR Executive Director Wolfgang Zimmermann said he is optimistic that the new emphasis on return to work and workplace mental health within the Labour Ministry will create new synergies and new opportunities for the University.

“They wanted to see what instruments we have that could provide better support in helping employers across Canada deal with the mental health question. So as part of that, there was a review of our education program, a review of our professional standards, and there was a review of how our assessment protocol can help, for which the government has already had the license for the past 10 years.”