



IDMSC Professional Designations Confer Best Practice Standards



In this second of three Bulletins, Canada's Certified Disability Management Professionals (CDMPs) and Certified Return to Work Coordinators (CRTWCs) share more on their backgrounds, current careers, and goals for the future. In addition, in an article she wrote for a company newsletter, Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant Denise Dietrich of Cascade Disability Management Inc. in Ontario recalls her approach to writing the CDMP exam in 2007. In 2010, she passed the CRTWC exam. Here is her story, and those of three other inspiring certified professionals who work in the growing Canadian DM field.



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Demystifying the Examination Process

"Four years ago, I joined a group of about 50 individuals at Ryerson University to write the certification examination for the designation of Certified Disability Management Professional. Passing the examination would entitle me to use the acronym CDMP and provide membership in the Canadian Society of Professionals in Disability Management (CSPDM).

When first learning of this designation by visiting the NIDMAR website, I was curious as to just what a DM professional was. With further research, I learned that this is a multidisciplinary profession and that my practice and values were well aligned. I also discovered that this was a relatively new designation with less than 100 CDMPs nationwide at that time, but that it was an international credential with practitioners in a variety of countries. I decided there was no harm in writing the examination and that I could psychologically survive a failure.

My journey to the examination centre began in 2007. The first step in taking the examination was to apply and be deemed as having the appropriate combination of education and experience to be eligible to write the examination. I was required to prepare an application package that included academic transcripts, letters of reference, and information about my past work experience. Following notification of acceptance, the real work began.

In the weeks leading up to the exam I spent as much time as possible reviewing my growing collection of standards, ethical guidelines, and articles on disability management that had been recommended in my study preparation guide. The more I read, the more confident I felt that this designation was a "good fit" with my practice. I entered the examination room feeling both confident and well prepared.

The exam is purposely broad recognizing that DM professionals work in a wide range of settings. While the multiple-choice



questions use a variety of contexts to present information, it is necessary to apply the principles of disability management to answer them. The examination was written in two parts and administered over two 3.5-hour testing periods. It took six full weeks to receive the results. Goal accomplished – I passed the examination and am now a CDMP.

On reflection, this is a goal I am glad I set and grateful that I achieved. This designation is achievable and the ongoing requirement to adhere to the ethical guidelines is not a burden, as these guidelines are well aligned with the manner in which we approach our work as vocational rehabilitation / disability management consultants. I hope that my experience encourages others to challenge themselves and join the examination group in 2011. The credential communicates to those we work with that we have achieved a base level of skill, ability, and knowledge to work in the field of disability management.”

Gaining the CRTWC designation

Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant Denise Dietrich's CDMP designation has served her well handling case files on behalf of Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), which were outsourced to her employer at Cascade Disability Management Inc. However, in a major shift announced in June 2010, the WSIB has now moved its return to work and vocational rehabilitation services in-house; (for more, see November 2010 *Bulletin* Vol. 6 No. 7).

During the transition, Dietrich will continue to maintain WSIB files as a member of Cascade's Toronto team, but will soon be faced with making a career move. With her impressive credentials and background, she is well-prepared for the change. A Registered Practical Nurse (RPN), Registered Rehabilitation Professional (RRP), and a Master's Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Professional (MCVP), she also has a master's degree in Health Studies from Alberta's Athabasca University. She has worked extensively in vocational and medical case management over the past 20 years for a variety of auto insurers, long-term insurance carriers, and in Disability Management Services for the Canada Pension Plan. As she chronicled in her article above, she gained her CDMP in 2007.

“I was unfamiliar with NIDMAR,” she recalls, “But I was orienting someone who had taken the whole series of Mohawk College return to work courses and I was impressed with her knowledge. I decided to learn more about the NIDMAR courses and certification, and after reviewing the online information, decided to put certification into my 2007 goals for the year.”

She had already been active in examination preparation as an elected council member for the College of Nurses of Ontario (2000-2006), and later as an appointed public member of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario. On top of that, Dietrich's



project work for her master's degree was related to assessment of ongoing professional competencies.

"Perhaps I was a little overconfident, but I read the blueprint guide of competencies to see what I needed, looked at the legislation, and developed my own self-study guide based on the competencies." She adds, "I was impressed with the fact that this is a credential with a common set of competencies tested through an examination. To me it indicated these were objective measures tested by an exam."

She decided to study for the CRTWC credentials last year. This was part of the learning goals she had set for herself that year and, in preparing for it, she took three of the NIDMAR modules in-class at Mohawk College. She chose modules on the WSIB, general insurance, and communication. She liked the class format and being able to take a course on Fridays while, for the first time, meeting others familiar with the modules and certification other than her original colleague. Even better, she says she benefited considerably from the updated knowledge.

"For one thing, privacy legislation had changed, human rights legislation is constantly evolving, and there were things you should know to be up to date and able to focus on individuals, more than the program alone. There was information on theories behind insurance, especially the WSIB, and the impact of injury on employers, and the benefits to them of successful return to work."

Now that she is both a CRTWC and CDMP, she advises she holds the designations in high regard, in particular, "because of the competencies that are evaluated to receive them."

Since her work at Cascade Disability Management is likely to wind up soon as case files are moved over to the WSIB's internal staff, Dietrich is readying herself for an expected job search. She'll be looking for a senior vocational rehabilitation position and has been pleased to see disability management job postings in Canada that require certification through NIDMAR. Since many major insurance companies are based between her home town of Waterloo and Toronto where she works, she's confident her job search in the DM field will allow her to stay on familiar ground.

Designation benefits case manager

"Our company really encourages education," says Regional Manager Ron Ferguson of the Winnipeg, Manitoba Disability Management Service Office (DMSO) of The Great-West Life Assurance Company.

Ferguson, who has been with Great-West Life for 10 years, was promoted to regional manager of the Winnipeg DMSO five months ago. Prior to his promotion, Ferguson worked on the company's intervention services side for Manitoba and Saskatchewan as assistant regional manager and also as team



manager in the Winnipeg DMSO, working side-by-side with the case managers.

Ferguson and his team now assist a variety of provincial employers, some with smaller staff levels of 30 to 50, and other national companies with employees in the thousands. Staying current to provide them with information in the area of disability management policy is crucial. Last year, Ferguson's office manager approached him with the idea of adding Certified Return To Work Coordinator (CRTWC) to his list of certifications; he is also a Certified Ergonomic Specialist (CES) and Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Professional (CVRP).

Ferguson challenged and passed the NIDMAR exam. "As a company, it shows Great-West Life is forward-thinking and stays in touch with new processes," he says.

He adds that other Great-West Life staff across the country, including some of the case managers in his office, are now going through the NIDMAR modules. He gives the example of one case manager coming to him recently after starting the program, stating, "this is awesome," as the program had already fast-tracked the case manager's ability to talk to employers about alternative return to work potential.

Ferguson sees a number of advantages to professional certification in disability management. "International designations like the CRTWC or CDMP are really beneficial in helping to keep the lines of communication open with employers," he says.

As well, Ferguson says employers with staff who have become certified can benefit from a better understanding of the applicable legislation in Canada and the demystifying of some aspects of disability.

On the frontlines at the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority

When it comes to her work as the Acting Manager of Disability Management for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Bernice Irvine, CDMP is clear about the high stakes involved in her job managing disabilities and return to work. "We don't want anybody to lose their home or miss out on the benefits they may be entitled to."

The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority employs around 28,000 workers, not including the 1,500 employees at each of four community hospitals, Winnipeg home care workers, and thousands of nurses. Each member of the team of eight case managers handles 130 to 150 cases at any one time. Case loads can spike too, for example, during bad winter weather when automobile accidents account for injuries among public health employees and home care workers. Mental health concerns account for some of the more complex cases, which Irvine notes have to be handled "just right." Job dissatisfaction can be a complicating factor.



A Certified Occupational Health Nurse (OHN) with a 22-year medical-based career, Irvine worked previously at one of Winnipeg's community hospitals where she handled occupational health and disability management, which she considered "another avenue of nursing care."

Taking one of NIDMAR's modules on how to put a DM program together, she saw there were also "black and white" components that were clear-cut, from legal issues and legislation to human rights and workers's compensation. After successfully passing the CDMP examination last year, she is confident that her DM skills are in line with best practices.

"I feel solid in my own education on it, which is very important. You need that to teach the concept to anyone else." It's a foundation that is extremely valuable in her job, where teaching others about the program is vital. "It's all about finesse, selling the program without being confrontational," she adds.

For Irvine, the credentials have given her the confidence to challenge certain decisions when she has a different perspective. For example, a medical decision that determines an employee is physically ready to return to work, doesn't take into account emotional issues that could be standing in the way of that return being successful. She refers cases to Human Resources to bring employees back if there is a need to accommodate into a different job after assessing the medical provided is sufficient. "You have to know your stuff, have a persuasive way about you, and be able to challenge things when appropriate."

Irvine has recommended the certification to others, including her own son who is now about half way through the modules. "I recommend it to anyone who has been working in the field for any length of time. It's extremely valuable to know that when you're out doing your job, you're using best practices and not complicating issues with wrong information."

Since becoming certified, she has been working with her director to present changes to the disability management program to senior management, prior to new policies and procedures being rolled out. She is also pleased about some "amazing" new breakthroughs her department has negotiated to improve long-term disability processes for employees.

"I'm passionate about what I do. It's the only time Human Resources, managers, supervisors, unions and third-party insurers can all come to the table and be non-confrontational while working towards the same goals. It's a beautiful thing."

Counselling military peers from personal experience

Fred Connor, CRTWC served in Canada's military forces in Cyprus in 1988 and in Bosnia in 1993, and after that at various posts across Canada during a 23-year military career. He was eventually diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder



(PTSD) some 13 years later on his return to Canada, and in 2008, was medically released from active military service after injuring his back during the ice storm of 1997. He knows first-hand the challenges of coping with disability. Today, he is a peer support coordinator at an Integrated Personnel Support Unit stationed at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Shilo, about 2.5 hours from Winnipeg, MB.

In his day-to-day work, Connor works with peers in the military and retired members, who face a variety of struggles related to Operational Stress Injuries (OSIs). His main role, he explains, is to “listen, assess, and refer.”

After taking the Employee Assistance Program training in 1999 run by the military, he says he felt better able to help people. From there, just prior to his release in 2008, he was motivated to take a look at the CRTWC designation after being encouraged by a fellow soldier to check out NIDMAR’s website. “Being injured myself, I was totally unaware of my rights and the employer’s duty to accommodate.” The website outlined courses in return to work legislation, physical impairments, functional capacity assessments, and the legal side of return to work – all areas of interest to Connor.

He prepared a strict schedule for completing the modules in consultation with NIDMAR. Although, he was advised he was setting a highly ambitious schedule and timeframe, he was determined to fast track the courses, anxious to gain the knowledge after being out of school for more than 20 years. He completed 25 modules in less than a year. Between October 2008 and September 2009, he completed roughly one module every second week.

Along the way, he learned about the federal disability tax credit, assistive devices, effective communication, and other aspects of return to work that help him in his job advising soldiers about the resources and entitlements available to them. “It’s all good information,” he says of the courses.

To prepare for the examination, he went through NIDMAR’s study package, revisited the modules, and re-studied papers he’d submitted. Although he didn’t finish the full study package, he used it as a guide, on top of a lot of reading and printing out questions and answers from the course as aids to better retention.

“I took the courses and did the certification and now can use it to help people, which is great. That’s what it’s all about,” he concludes.

In terms of the future, he believes, “Knowledge is a powerful thing and it’s always portable. Even if it is not attributable to what you’re doing, there’s always an overlap somewhere down the road later in life.”