



Designation Provides Positive Career Move for Professionals



The designations of Certified Return to Work Coordinator (CRTWC) and Certified Disability Management Professional (CDMP), administered under the auspices of the International Disability Management Standards Council (IDMSC), are increasingly becoming the gold standard in disability management practice worldwide.

Some of Canada's Certified Disability Management Professionals (CDMPs) and Certified Return to Work Coordinators (CRTWCs) talk about their education, experience, and how earning a DM designation has enhanced their career paths.

National railway seeks cost/benefit analysis of certification

Newly minted CDMP Susannah Duvall could well be the advance scout for Canadian National Railway. Duvall is the worker's compensation officer in the law department at CN's office in Surrey, BC, and last May, she wrote the CDMP exam.

"When I first looked into this designation, I was asked by my bosses to do a detailed breakdown for them of what benefits the certification would be for my counterparts across the country. There are one to three of us in each province or region," Duvall said.

For Duvall, achieving CDMP certification has been a steady progression since graduating from the University of British Columbia with a Bachelor of Human Kinetics in 2003. "I started out doing hands-on rehab, working in a physiotherapy office – occupational and motor vehicle accidents," she said. "I originally applied at CN as a return to work coordinator in 2007. I was accepted, and I worked as the RTW coordinator for five months, and then the position I'm currently in opened up."

Duvall shifted from being a contract worker to CN management staff, and continued upgrading her credentials while working full-time. "In 2009 I completed a diploma in Rehabilitation Management from Simon Fraser University. We did it one weekend a month – Thursday, Friday and Saturday – over the course of a year. It is designed for working professionals, so that you don't have to miss a lot of work," she said.

With her degree, diploma and work experience, Duvall made the bold decision to challenge the certification examination. The examination was conducted at her old alma mater, UBC, and it stretched Duvall to the limit. "That examination was brutal. It was one of the hardest exams I have written in my life," she said. "Nobody could come into this exam without years of experience in the field. Book knowledge is only part of it – you need time in the field."

The CDMP certification may not immediately bring a pay increase or new job responsibilities, but Duvall sees it as a sound career move. "I like to keep myself sharp and I like to keep myself competitive," she said. For employees working in the fields of DM, human resources or labour relations, having a CDMP designation adds just a little more certainty to one's career, Duvall believes. "It is a certificate that holds a high degree of credibility. Anyone of a certain level who works in the field is aware of the certification, so in terms of assigning credibility to your name, I think it is useful – especially for the higher-level positions," she said.



Young mom uses latest training to build DM program

For Tina Durante, benefits supervisor for the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC), the challenge of setting up a formal DM program was too good to pass up. For the young Edmonton resident, it has been a swift climb up the ladder since completing university in 2008.

"I have my Bachelor's in Management, with a major in Human Resources and Labour Relations from the University of Lethbridge," Durante said. "I am thankful that I have that – we learned collective agreements, human rights...it's been important because it's in everything you do. You have to be up to par with legislation in everything you say or do."

Durante was first involved in the DM field as a benefits analyst with the consulting firm Stantec. "I left on maternity leave and came here in 2010," Durante said. "I was planning on returning to Stantec, but the opportunity here came up and there was the combination of benefits and being involved in the start of a formalized DM program."

Durante discovered that AGLC had always managed workplace absence; the clients were looked after, but the service was informal. The employer proved extremely flexible when it came to bringing the young mother back to work. "In all honesty, it was easy," she said. "Obviously, leaving an infant child at home is tough, but they made it work for me, because they were so supportive." At AGLC, the challenge has been to formalize a process for something that in the past "just got done."

For Durante, earning her CDMP was a logical move to increase her workplace capabilities. Durante prepared for the examination by completing the NIDMAR modules online, from September through June. That's while continuing to work full-time and raising a small child. "I took all 25 modules and it played a major part in successfully completing the examination," Durante said.

Of the individual modules, Durante said Evaluation was perhaps the most valuable. "That one was really strong, because there was never really an evaluation process in DM here," Durante said. "I took everything I could out of that course so I could start building a baseline in what I wanted to evaluate. Also, Legislation was huge – I took quite a bit out of that."

Durante said the CDMP certification does not result in any immediate increase in pay or benefits, but she believes it is a true career enhancement. "Both the courses and having the certification have helped, and it makes you more recognized – that you are more experienced in the field," Durante said. "I would definitely tell anybody who wants to get into this field to do it."



CRTWC hopes to pass on knowledge to next generation

For Rehanna Nizrudin, the education process never stops. Nizrudin is employed as an accommodation and DM specialist at York University, handling Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) of Ontario claims for a wide range of clients. "We have 11,000 employees at York, from Campus Services and Business Operations through professors, administrative and support staff. The campus that I work at is a community unto itself," Nizrudin said.

Her academic career began at Sheridan College, where she completed a diploma in Business Admin. with a major in Human Resources. Then she went on to Ryerson, where she got a Bachelor of Commerce in Human Resources Management and was also working full-time while attending school.

During her time at Ryerson, Nizrudin was first exposed to the DM/RTW field through her employer. "My big break was when I first became involved in WSIB claims while working for a private disability management company," she said. "There, I worked with the president of the organization who became my mentor. He taught me everything from how to review an accident investigation form to how to prepare an appeal file."

Nizrudin graduated from Ryerson in 2007 and it was shortly after beginning her employment at York that she began to experience the full spectrum of challenges faced by employees with non-occupational illness. "I have been on long-term disability for about a year now, while I am recovering from my illness," she said. "I was diagnosed in 2009, and I kept working all through my treatment and surgeries, only taking off a few weeks at a time to recover."

For part of that time, Nizrudin worked out of her home, a generous accommodation provided by her employer, but eventually she had to book off until she has sufficiently recovered. "I do anticipate returning to work in the near future," she said. But in the meantime, she has managed to continue her education, including achieving her CRTWC.

"I completed my certification as part of my recovery process. I am one of those people that, going to school makes me feel better," Nizrudin said. At the same time, she has also completed her certificate in Teacher/Trainer of Adults through Humber College, and this fall, plans to become a Certified Training and Development Professional through the Canadian Society for Training and Development. Nizrudin believes the field of DM is in a period of massive growth and her goal is to help train the next generation of professionals.

"I haven't been in the field for that long, but I believe it's time for me to train somebody else. Let's get some fresh blood and fresh eyes to go out there and make a career of this. And it's absolutely beneficial for anybody to have a CDMP or CRTWC designation behind them, because it is recognized in so many countries around the world."