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## **PCU-WHS International Research Advisory Council Chair Appointed**

The Board of Governors of the Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences (PCU-WHS) is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Donal McAnaney as founding Chair of its International Research Advisory Council.

McAnaney, who holds a PhD in educational psychology, was Director of Program Development for the Rehab Group, a private not-for-profit organization serving people with disabilities based in Ireland and the UK, and is a well-known top researcher in the field of disability management and works throughout Europe and indeed, the world. He is Senior Research Consultant, Work Research Centre, Dublin; Lecturer and Associate Researcher, Centre for Disability Studies, University College of Dublin (UCD); Team Leader, Bernard Brunhes International Research and Training Consultant, European Platform for Rehabilitation; Chair, Board of Professional Conduct, Psychological Society of Ireland; and Past Chair, Global Applied Disability Research and Information network on Employment and Training. He has worked closely with the National Institute of Disability Management and Research since 1998.

Born in Dublin, McAnaney attended the University College of Dublin. "After graduation, I went into teaching learning-disabled children," McAnaney said. "We were doing a lot of campaigning on dyslexia as a special-education need." He subsequently left teaching to pursue a degree in psychology and qualified as a clinical psychologist. "Then I decided to see the world. That's when I went to McGill to work on a doctoral program in educational psychology, and got a job the minute I came back to Ireland."

During his tenure at the Rehab Group, McAnaney set up the first graduate degree program for social and vocational rehabilitation at UCD, a program he still teaches on a part-time basis. During the same time he also conducted major international research programs into disability management and return to work policies in Europe and around the world, through agencies such as the Office for Economic Cooperation and Development and the International Labour Organization of the United Nations.

At the first meeting of the Academic Council of PCU-WHS in Vancouver on April 12, McAnaney summed up his findings after several decades of studying how employers and countries deal with people who become sick or injured while on the job. "It's not about managing people, it's about managing the factors in the workplace that cause people to become disabled," he said.

McAnaney cited one study that randomly surveyed 2,000 people in the Netherlands, the UK and Austria that revealed physical injury is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to getting workers back into the workplace. "The big question we had was, what was the role of stress and mental distress in sickness/absence and return to work?" McAnaney said.

"Co-morbidity, where stress occurred, was 19 per cent, and mental distress on its own added another 10 to 15 per cent. That's over 30 per cent of all return to work cases where there is some component of stress. In its most recent publication, the OECD warned that we are not paying enough attention to people who are in distress before they become ill."



# PACIFIC COAST UNIVERSITY

FOR WORKPLACE HEALTH SCIENCES

Under Bill PR 401 – 2007, the *Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences Act*, the new University is required by statute to have an International Research Advisory Council consisting of members who are “internationally-recognized leaders, from educational institutions or private or government organizations, in relation to occupational health and safety, disability management and rehabilitation, and related subjects.”

In making the appointment announcement, Ken Neumann and Trevor James, Labour and Employer Co-Chairs of the PCU-WHS Board of Governors commented, “We are extremely pleased that someone with Dr. McAnaney’s vast experience in the whole field of work and disability has accepted this challenging opportunity. The University’s mandate addresses the entire life-long workplace health cycle and we are very confident that Dr. McAnaney will be able to establish the strategic research priorities/direction for PCU-WHS in a manner where it will directly contribute to better outcomes for workers and employers.”

“What we are trying to do is reduce the factors in the worker’s life that are pushing or pulling them out of work, because sometimes, not going to work can become quite attractive,” McAnaney said. “It’s a complex picture. That’s why we need a University and why we need a research program.”

The PCU-WHS campus was built on a 1.4-hectare parcel of land donated by the City of Port Alberni. An official opening of the facility took place in September 2011.

Following a review by the Academic Council, the program proposal for a Bachelor’s Degree in Workplace Health Sciences, specialization in Disability Management, was submitted to the Degree Quality Assessment Board of the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education in May.