



Designations and curriculum go to Switzerland



From left: Dr. Friedrich Mehrhoff, head of the department of rehabilitation and international relations for the HVBG, Herbert Bürgisser director of the HSA Luzern, and Wolfgang Zimmermann, NIDMAR executive director, at the official signing of the agreement between HVBG and HSA Luzern (University of Lucerne, College of Social Work).

LUCERNE: The latest organization to deliver the NIDMAR curriculum is HSA Luzern (University of Lucerne, College of Social Work), in cooperation with the Hochschule für Wirtschaft (College of Economics).

The curriculum will give Swiss disability management and return to work professionals the skills and abilities to operate, deliver and assist the return to work process. This will ensure that knowledge and expertise is retained at Swiss companies, rather than lost when employees are ill or disabled.

The German Federation of Workers' Compensation Boards translated and employed the curriculum to great success, so licensing it to Switzerland was a logical step as disability management awareness gains ground in Europe.

"The curriculum gives us the possibility to discuss and develop awareness," says Herbert Bürgisser, director of HSA Luzern. "At the congress in Lucerne about disability management in November 2005, there was good response - many people showed an interest in this education."

This is a good sign, since the country is seeing an increase in the number of people leaving their work due to illness, accidents and, more and more, psychological complaints.

"This trend means that costs for social security are rising and rising," says Bürgisser. "This is also going to be a big financial problem - even for a rich country like Switzerland. So developing disability management in Switzerland is very important."

In sharp contrast to North American corporate giants, 97 per cent of all firms in Switzerland are small and medium size companies with fewer than 100 employees.

"In this kind of company, it is more difficult to integrate disability management," says Bürgisser. "For example, they have no personnel department. So our first aim must be motivation, to convince firms that disability management is a good idea."

The college is currently building an advisory board with representatives from employers, unions, rehabilitation doctors, insurance and corporate social workers.

With the transfer of the designations to Switzerland, professionals there will have the opportunity to write the Certified Return to Work Coordinator (CRTWC) and the Certified Disability Management Professional (CDMP) certification examinations in their own country, under the auspices of the International Disability Management Standards Council (IDMSC). The agreement also provides the opportunity for ongoing Swiss participation in the continuing development of the professional standards.

Once the curriculum has been offered allowing an opportunity for individuals to receive formal DM education and the certification examinations have been administered, successful candidates will begin to use these well-recognized professional designations.

Grounded in international best practice research, and incorporating the core value components of the International Labour Organization's *Code of practice on managing disability in the workplace*, these credentials are the mark of the best professionals in the field. ■