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Unum UK to host the 2012 IFDM



Unum, the UK's largest group income protection insurer (www.unum.co.uk), has agreed to host in London, England the 2012 International Forum on Disability Management (IFDM) — the tenth anniversary of the conference. Founded by NIDMAR, the IFDM is now under the auspices of the International Disability Management Standards Council (IDMSC), an international multi-stakeholder agency aimed at reducing the human, social and economic costs of disability in the workplace.

Hosting the conference is a natural fit for Unum, which adopted NIDMAR's entire disability management protocol in 2005. The company has also proven its leadership in disability management by hosting the Beginnings conference over the past five years, which brings together government and disability groups to raise the profile of significant disability issues nationally.

"This provides a natural evolution for Beginnings, giving it a broader and more international perspective," says Susan Ring, Unum's chief executive officer. "We believe that the conference will bring valuable international experience into the UK." She cites North America and Australia as jurisdictions ahead on the learning curve. As well, "we can learn a lot from our neighbours in continental Europe," she says.

Unum has already built an innovative occupational rehabilitation program, incorporating best practices from a number of jurisdictions. Hosting the IFDM will also help spread understanding about the approach Unum takes to disability management.

"We hope the conference will give a really strong profile to the work we are doing in occupational rehabilitation training and auditing because nothing occurs in isolation, it all occurs in context," says Joy Reymond, Unum's head of Rehabilitation Services, who also sits on the IDMSC board. "If people understand the different approaches to disability management in North America and Europe, then they are more likely to value what we do at Unum."

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IFDM: AN EVOLVING HISTORY

The International Forum on Disability Management is a biennial event that explores global leadership opportunities in workplace disability. Aimed at highlighting advances in education, best practice, research and public policy, it targets employers, insurance/service providers, unions and government representatives, as well as individuals from the disability community. The following is a brief history of IFDM conferences:

2002: The first IFDM was attended by 400 delegates from 10 countries. It was organized by NIDMAR, and held in Vancouver, BC, in May. The forum offered 24 sessions, and included Canada's second National Awards of Excellence in Disability Management ceremony.

2004: The second IFDM took place in Maastricht, The Netherlands. Organized by TNO Arbeid (TNO Work & Employment) and the Commissie Werkend Perspectief (National Committee Work Perspectives), the conference offered nearly 40 sessions on a wide range of DM-related topics to delegates representing 28 countries.

2006: The third IFDM was held in Brisbane, Australia in October, hosted by the Centre of National Research on Disability and Rehabilitation Medicine (CONROD) at the University of Queensland and Griffith University. Approximately 350 participants representing 15 countries attended plenaries and workshops over the three days of the conference.

2008: The fourth IFDM will be held in Berlin, Germany, September 22-24, 2008. Based on the theme "Breaking Down Barriers Together", it is being organized by the Federal Association of the German Insurers Against Work Accidents and Occupational Diseases together with the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. More information is available at www.ifdm2008.de.

2010: The fifth IFDM will be held in the United States, hosted by the International Association of Industrial Accident Boards and Commissions. The event will coincide with the association's annual convention, tentatively scheduled for California. Further information will be posted at www.idmsc.org as it becomes available.

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Joanne Hindle, who chairs the Beginnings conference and will be responsible for the 2012 IFDM event, says, "This will be a unique opportunity for Unum to sponsor a conference of international calibre on a subject at our centre of expertise. It will reinforce our leadership in this area with government and private enterprise, giving us a valuable profile both in the UK and abroad."

While Unum plans to build on the success and format of previous IFDM conferences, there will be one outstanding difference to the 2012 event — it will be held in London, home to the Olympic summer games that year. Both the 2012 summer games and the 2010 winter games in Vancouver/Whistler aim to have the most sustainable games ever, including social sustainability.

"The connection to the Olympics is one we are actively pursuing, particularly the Paralympics for obvious reasons," adds Hindle.

The 2012 International Forum on Disability Management symbolizes continuity and reflects the growing interest worldwide in getting people who are coping with disabilities or illness back to work.

"Having co-chaired the first IFDM in my previous role as senior vice-president of Human Resources for Weyerhaeuser, I am extremely pleased to see that 2012 marks not only the tenth anniversary but also the sixth IFDM. This is a clear testimony to the growing international significance of disability-related issues in the workplace and their socio-economic impact on employers, workers, providers and governments," says Steve Hill, administrator of the Washington State Health Care Authority and an IDMSC co-chair.

Brian Payne, long-time labour leader and co-chair of the first IFDM, is also pleased to see that through these conferences, effective disability management is gaining momentum around the world.

"This is especially meaningful since the recently adopted UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities places special emphasis on the employment and job retention needs of workers who acquire a disabling condition," says Payne, IDMSC co-chair and former president of the CEP Union of Canada.