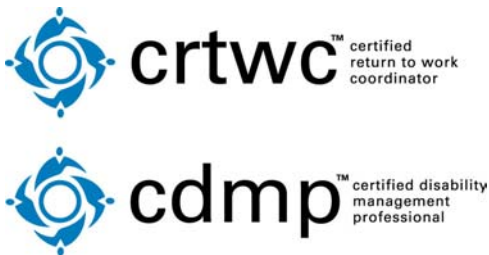


Certified Disability Management Professionals gain increased job and career flexibility



In this second of three issues, the Bulletin spoke with individuals across the country who successfully passed the certification examinations for the designations of Certified Disability Management Professional (CDMP) and Certified Return to Work Coordinator (CRTWC) to explore how this achievement has affected their careers.

Saskatchewan university recognizes professional approach

For the past year, Judy Metcalfe, CDMP has been Manager of the Health and Wellness unit at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. The unit, consisting of herself, two occupational health nurses, an ergonomist and a claims manager, deals with lost-time incidents, of which the leading ones include mental health issues and musculoskeletal injuries. She spends about 80 percent of her time on disability management and the rest on health promotion activities.

While her position is a new one at the university, Metcalfe's own career spans 25 years. Previously employed with the Saskatoon Health Region, she has held past management positions in occupational health, safety and return to work. However, as a supervisor she was "hands off" in terms of actual DM practice.

Learning a new job at the university that is more "hands on", she saw the opportunity to test her knowledge and abilities and chose NIDMAR's credentials "primarily because they are Canadian," she explains.

She and one of the unit's occupational health nurses successfully wrote the examinations in May 2008. "Now that we're in a learning environment at the university, it allowed us to check our knowledge and then gave us credibility for the services we're providing."

Before writing the examination, she focused on keeping up with current research findings and was pleased to find excellent Canadian text books. She adds, "In the past there has been no common approach to practice. We now have standards and principles to follow."



Overall, she found it both reaffirming and reassuring that writing the examination showed “we do know what we’re doing.” On top of that, the department heads and union people she works with have a greater sense of comfort that her unit has a professional approach to return to work planning.

In her last 25 years in the field, she has seen a lot of changes including the significance of the work NIDMAR has been doing to develop standards. “A lot of return to work coordinators work in isolation, which puts them at risk and poses the question ‘are you doing the right thing?’ Seeing those standards developed has improved progress for both employers and employees.”

As a result, she’s seen a greater level of acceptance among employers. “Here at the university, the cooperation level for disability management is very high. It’s just a normal part of what we do here.”

Metcalfe is a few years away from retirement and although she does not want to work full-time at that point, she can foresee working part-time in another capacity. She’s satisfied her CDMP will stand her in good stead. “This is a good designation in this field if I go out as a consultant in the future.”

Winnipeg manufacturer supported designation

Motor Coach Industries (MCI) is the leading manufacturer of intercity coaches for tour, charter and transit markets in the U.S. and Canada. With a major workforce of nearly 2,000 employees, MCI is headquartered in Schaumburg, Illinois and operates plants in Winnipeg, Manitoba and North Dakota.

Lindsay Sepke, CDMP, joined MCI four years ago in a human resources role and was quickly promoted to disability manager coordinator. “I was very, very green in return to work and disability management,” said Sepke, recalling her initial months at MCI.

With more on-the-job experience under her belt, Sepke received a promotion again, this time to disability management supervisor. Her boss, who was manager of an employee with a CDMP designation in a previous job, suggested Sepke look into earning her certification.

Interested in furthering her own development, Sepke took her boss’ advice and began researching the NIDMAR program. “The courses offered pertained to what I was doing in my everyday work life,” said Sepke.



Completing the NIDMAR Return to Work Coordinator Program and earning a Certified Disability Management Professional designation, Sepke values what the program offers. “It was a very enjoyable learning experience,” she says. “The course work was challenging and hard work. The instructors were great. I feel that I have gained significant knowledge and transferable skills that are valuable assets to my company and future career path.”

In September, Sepke transferred out of the DM supervisory role to take on a new challenge as a Human Resources Generalist at the company. “It’s still very early in my career,” she explains. “I have an opportunity to grow here and develop my skill set in another area.”

However, her designation is still an advantage in the new job. “The listening and empathetic interview skills I learned in the program still apply,” she explains. “Dealing with employee relations, I better understand the root cause of employees’ issues and concerns. These skills are key to resolving workplace issues.”

Sepke doesn’t see herself leaving the field of DM altogether. Instead, she envisions a future position where she can combine disability management with the other human resources skills she is currently honing. Said Sepke, “I’m very proud to be a CDMP.”

Ontario insurer advocated approach

Cidalia (Cid) Pasquale, CDMP, Rehabilitation Consultant has worked at Great-West Life for nine years where she develops “realistic” return to work plans for claimants and clients. “In other words,” she says, “functional ability is realistically matched to job demands.”

“You need to incorporate the health professional and any other stakeholders into your return to work plan. It is vital to ensure that everyone helps manage disability and come up with the same end goal,” she explains, adding, “It’s about what you can do versus what you can’t do.”

She has gained much since earning the CDMP designation. For starters, she advises that the NIDMAR courses helped her gain “more perspective on how to handle disability, rather than as a claim with a number. Individuals who are on disability benefits are human beings who need guidance to help them back to the workforce.”

Originally encouraged by a manager who advocated NIDMAR’s approach, Pasquale began the NIDMAR program and was thrilled



with its content. She credits Mohawk College's disability management program director, Patti Boucher, with being an excellent mentor. "Patti got my interest going. I gained a wealth of knowledge and through the courses learned how valuable interaction is with others in the industry."

Although she notes all the modules were very useful and intertwined, she found three areas of study particularly compelling in her field, including early intervention, communication and legislation. "All the modules provide you with the knowledge to then apply to your everyday work. It's about having baseline fundamental guidelines to work with."

Already she says more and more clients want to work with employees before they go on LTD. "It is not good enough to only try to manage disability once an individual goes off work. You need to come up with a meaningful disability management plan to keep them at work."

Her designation helps her do that. "The designation gives me credibility. It is a respected designation among professionals both medical and non medical. It's of great value when you are respected throughout the world with this designation."

But there have been big advantages beyond the workplace too. Pasquale is now a disability management instructor herself at Mohawk College. "I love it. It has been a passion of mine to teach." It has spun-off at work too where she has become a bit of an ambassador for people wanting to know more about the courses and NIDMAR.

"I feel very strongly in promoting NIDMAR. I would also encourage others not to give up pursuing disability management in their workplaces. The courses and the examination give you examples of exactly how to do that using best practices."