

at work

Information on workplace research from the **Institute for Work & Health**

This Issue

For Clinicians

Educational videos available soon,
CEO of Nurses' Association joins board

For Workplace

Low-back pain and the workplace

For Policy

Former Deputy Minister of Labour joins
Institute's board

For Researchers

Work-Ready project part of
employers' seminar

This Issue's Supplement

The occupational health of workers in health care professions has traditionally been understudied. However, current research is bringing to light a number of factors, aside from the biomechanical (physical), that appear to affect this group's health.

For additional copies of this newsletter, please contact Laura Maniago by e-mail, info@iwh.on.ca.



**Research Excellence
Advancing Employee Health**

Institute Hosts Tribute to Leadership of J. Fraser Mustard

Dr. J. Fraser Mustard, who stepped down earlier this year as Chair of the Institute's Board of Directors, was the guest of honour at a gala reception to celebrate his work and leadership. The event, held at the King Edward Hotel in Toronto on October 20, also raised \$50,000 to support the Mustard Fellowship in Work Environment and Health, which is named for Dr. Mustard.

The Institute took this opportunity to celebrate Mustard's contribution to the Institute's research program and recognize his scientific excellence and social responsibility. He has contributed ten years of leadership to the Institute for Work & Health. Under his guidance it has become, in the words of Len Syme of the University of California at Berkeley, "the leading research institute in North America on work and health issues."

Over 200 guests joined the Institute's Board of Directors and staff for this special event. The guest speaker for the evening's celebrations was Mr. Firoz Rasul, the Board Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of

Ballard Power Systems Inc. Dr. Mustard stepped down as Ballard Power's Board Chair earlier this year.

Born in Toronto, Dr. Mustard has been a physician and medical scientist at the University of Toronto and McMaster

University.

After 16 years at McMaster, where he helped establish a new medical school, he took on the task in 1982 of creating The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. Recently he co-chaired, with the

Honourable Margaret McCain, the Early Years Learning Study for the Ontario Government.

Dr. Mustard will continue to work with the Institute as a board member and Chair of The Foundation for Research & Education in Work & Health Studies. ▲

For more information about the event or the Foundation, contact Jackie Cooper, Research Transfer Associate at jcooper@iwh.on.ca.

The Mustard Fellowship in Work Environment and Health is named in honour of Dr. J. Fraser Mustard. This post-doctoral fellowship provides support to promising young researchers to build innovative research capabilities for conducting multidisciplinary studies in the area of work environments and employee health. The current recipient of the Mustard Fellowship is Mieke Koehoorn. The fellowship is funded by The Foundation for Research & Education in Work & Health Studies.



Terry Sullivan

Fraser Mustard

Firoz Rasul

The Institute for Work & Health is a knowledge-based change organization that strives to research and promote: new ways to prevent workplace disability, improved treatment, and optimal recovery and safe return-to-work.

CHAIR

Dr. Lorna Marsden
President and Vice Chancellor
York University

VICE-CHAIR

Marilyn Knox
President, Nutrition
Nestlé Canada, Inc.

DIRECTORS

Dr. Fraser Mustard
Head
The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research
- The Founders' Network

Linda Jolley
Vice-President, Policy & Research
Workplace Safety & Insurance Board

Andrew King
Executive Director
Occupational Health Clinic for Ontario Workers

Pearl MacKay-Blake
Executive Assistant to the President
United Food & Commercial Workers International
Union (UFCW) Local 1000A

Rosemary McCarney
Vice-President
Workforce Strategy & Employee Communications
Nortel Networks

Heather Munroe-Blum
Vice-President
Research & International Relations
University of Toronto

John O'Grady
Labour Market Consultant, Toronto, Ontario

Mark Rochon
President & CEO
Rehabilitation Institute of Toronto

Terrence Sullivan
President
Institute for Work & Health

Len Syme
Professor Emeritus, School of Public Health
Department of Epidemiology
University of California at Berkeley

Ed Welch
Assistant Professor
School of Labor and Industrial Relations
Michigan State University

Lesley Bell
Chief Executive Officer
Ontario Nurses' Association

George Thomson
Special Advisor to the Minister of Justice
and Attorney General of Canada
Office of the Minister
Department of Justice

Glen Wright
Chair
Workplace Safety & Insurance Board

Some Clinical News



WSIB/IWH CLINICAL GRAND ROUNDS - VIDEO PACKAGES

The Institute for Work & Health, in collaboration with the Workplace Safety & Insurance Board, is participating in monthly educational seminars with nurse case managers, physicians and adjudicators. The goals of these presentations are to disseminate Institute and other relevant research, to discuss the practical application of research findings, and to promote evidence-based practice in the continuum of care for injured workers.

The Institute and the WSIB have videotaped these presentations and will soon be offering them for sale. Some of the available titles are: *Upper Extremity Disorders: Managing in the Grey Zone*, *Back Belts for the Prevention and Treatment of Occupational Low-Back Injuries*, *Prognostic Factors for Soft-Tissue Injury Claimants*, *Diagnostic Labeling or Classification: What's in a name?*, *Psychosocial Risk Factors for Musculoskeletal Disorders*, and *The Principles of Evidence-Based Practice*. 🏔️

For more information regarding the presentations and their availability contact **Laura Maniago** at 416.927.2027 Ext. 2101 or by e-mail: info@iwh.on.ca. The project leader is **Deirdre McKenzie**, dmckenzie@iwh.on.ca.

Ms. LESLEY BELL JOINS BOARD

The Chief Executive Officer of the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA), Ms. Lesley Bell, was named to the Board of Directors



Lesley Bell

for the Institute for Work & Health. Bell has had a long relationship with the ONA, holding a number of positions over the years.

Before moving to the ONA, Bell worked for Salvation Army Grace Hospital and graduated *cum laude* with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Ottawa.

Bell has served on provincial Ministry of Health committees and is currently on the Board of Directors of the Registered Nurses Foundation of Ontario. 🏔️

BACKGUIDE

This interactive educational software is a tool for use in managing the care of low back pain by facilitators in small workshops or for self-directed learning. The BackGuide™ was developed by the Institute for Work & Health in collaboration with the University of Calgary and New Media Interactive.

It contains case studies with diagnostic and therapeutic challenges for the user, *U.S. Agency for Health Care Policy and Research (AHCPR) Guidelines*, including detailed information on guideline development, recommendations

and references and *Care Plans* to direct participants through algorithms outlining the management of low-back pain. The software is available on CD-ROM or at www.backguide.com. 🏔️

For more information, contact **Vicki Pennick** by e-mail at vpennick@iwh.on.ca or visit the Backguide website: www.backguide.com.

Of Interest to Policy Makers



George Thomson

INSTITUTE BOARD WELCOMES GEORGE THOMSON

The Institute for Work & Health is pleased to announce that Mr. George Thomson, Special Advisor to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of

Canada, has joined its Board of Directors. Thomson's distinguished career in law and public service began at the University of Western Ontario, where he served as an Assistant and then

Associate Professor of Law, and in a short time became the Assistant Dean of the Law School. In 1972, Thomson was appointed Judge of the Provincial Court for the province of Ontario.

After serving as Associate Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services, Thomson briefly returned to the bench before becoming Director of Education for the Law Society of Upper Canada. Thomson took up the appointment of Deputy Minister of Citizenship, followed by Deputy Minister of Labour, Ontario Deputy Attorney General and then Deputy Minister of Justice for Canada. 🏔️



SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT IMPORTANT IN REPORTING LOW-BACK PAIN

Low-back pain is the most common reason for filing a compensation claim in both the United States and Canada, and is responsible for a large proportion of compensation costs, lost productivity, and worker disability.

Institute research associate Jonathan Smith is set to defend his Master's thesis on low-back pain (LBP) compensation claims among automobile manufacturers. His research, investigating the type of action workers take when they have LBP, is using data collected as part of the Institute's larger study of work-related LBP, conducted in collaboration with scientists from the University of Waterloo.

The implications of his research suggest that providing flexible work tasks and a supportive work environment that encourages workers to report physical symptoms arising from job tasks may help reduce the burden of low-back pain disability and its associated costs.

Smith looked at what workers do when they have LBP — whether they continue to work with their symptoms without reporting them, or report to the company health nurse, or whether they file a worker's compensation claim. He was interested in how these outcomes were related to a variety of factors.

The research was done with workers at the General Motors plant in Oshawa. When he compared workers who reported their low-back pain to the workplace to workers who had low-back pain but who had not reported it, he found some interesting results:

- ▲ those who did report had more physically demanding jobs, and had more trouble with day-to-day low-back functional ability;
- ▲ those who did report also perceived their jobs as requiring more physical exertion; and
- ▲ this group had higher job satisfaction, indicative of a more supportive work environment.

When the group of claimants were compared to the workers who reported their injury to the company nurse but did not file a claim, there were also some noted differences:

- ▲ evidence suggests that non-claimants may suffer from more widespread musculoskeletal conditions of which their low-back pain is a part, perhaps associated with impaired sleep;
- ▲ pain symptoms reported by claimants were much more severe;
- ▲ non-claimants appear to have more control over their job tasks;
- ▲ claimants felt that their jobs required more physical exertion than non-claimants; and
- ▲ claimants had a much higher sense of empowerment, suggesting that workers with a supportive work environment can file compensation claims for low-back pain without fear of negative consequence. 🏔️

Jonathan Smith may be reached by e-mail at jsmith@iwh.on.ca. For a list of Institute publications on low-back pain, contact Laura Maniago, (416) 927-2027 Ext. 2101 or by e-mail at info@iwh.on.ca. Information is also available on our web site: www.iwh.on.ca.

IT'S NOT JUST ONE; IT'S BOTH

The Institute's research at General Motors in collaboration with colleagues at the University of Waterloo has focused mainly on the origins of low-back pain. The studies have found that the causes of low-back pain are equally shared by biomechanical and psychosocial factors. Both strongly contribute to injury rates and how workers react when they are injured.

The research has pointed out that the people who reported their back injury were more likely to enjoy their work. Also, those who reported their injury were also people who felt they had good co-worker support.

While these two specific findings may seem a bit strange at

first, Mickey Kerr, one of the lead scientists, says that most of the injured workers had stayed at work and not taken time off. Presumably, they needed to depend on their co-workers to help them while their backs were sore, and they would probably need to like their jobs to stay at work despite the pain they were feeling.

Another interesting fact that came out of the research is that there seems to be much more to how a worker experiences the physical demands of their job than what can be measured by "objective" biomechanical tools. "Even detailed biomechanical assessments are missing something," says Kerr, "We can only get at this 'missing' information when we ask workers how they see it. Perhaps we're missing stuff like individual tolerance, or the effects of prior injuries. Either way, it seems there's a risk that we are being too specific when we try to objectively quantify risk factors for lower back pain." 🏔️

For more information contact Dee Kramer, Research Transfer by e-mail at dkramer@iwh.on.ca. For a list of Institute publications on low-back pain, contact Laura Maniago, (416) 927-2027 Ext. 2101 or info@iwh.on.ca. Information is also available on our web site: www.iwh.on.ca.





WORK-READY

The Institute for Work & Health participated in the 10th Annual Schedule 2 Employers' Seminar on Workplace Insurance in September to present and discuss "What Works in Return-to-Work? The Evidence". Using case scenarios that were developed in the Work-Ready project depicting various stakeholder issues, workshop participants discussed what went wrong and what might have been improved. Key points from the

research evidence were then introduced and the session concluded with each group presenting their findings to the larger group.

Work-Ready is a tri-provincial collaborative research project (Ontario, Manitoba & Quebec) funded in part by HEALNet. The Work-Ready materials are being finalized in cooperation with NIDMAR, and will be available in the new year. 🏔️

For more information on the Work-Ready project, contact Vicki Pennick by e-mail, vpennick@iwh.on.ca.

PLANS FOR 2001 INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS MOVING AHEAD

The Australian hosts of the 2001 International Congress on Work Injuries Prevention, Rehabilitation and Compensation have announced it will be held from the 14th to the 20th of March, 2001 in Melbourne and Adelaide.

This international meeting on work injuries was last hosted in Toronto by the Institute for Work & Health and the Ontario Workplace Safety & Insurance Board in June, 1999. Previous conferences were held in Munich and Jerusalem.

For the Australian event, over 500 participants from Europe, Canada, USA Australia and New Zealand will meet to discuss the range of approaches around the work in work injuries prevention, rehabilitation and compensation. Other themes for the congress include health issues, labour market issues and vision for the future.

The deadline for submission of abstracts is March 3, 2000 and more information about the event is available from the congress web site: www.workcongress5.org or by e-mail from the secretariat (secretariat@workcongress5.org).

For more information on the 4th International Congress hosted by the Institute or for a link to the Australian site, visit our web site: www.iwh.on.ca.



at work

Information on workplace research from the **Institute for Work & Health**

Published by
Institute for Work & Health
250 Bloor Street East, Suite 702
Toronto, ON Canada M4W 1E6
Tel: (416) 927.2027 Fax: (416) 927.4167
Email: atwork@iwh.on.ca
Website: www.iwh.on.ca

Manager, Communications: Peter D. Birt

Editor: Chris St. Croix

Design: Vigeon Design & Associates

Photography: Larry Newland

Contributors: Michael Collins,
Jackie Cooper, Dee Kramer,
Deirdre McKenzie, Vicki Pennick

Issue #13 November 1999
ISSN # 1261-5148

© Copyright 1999

The Institute for Work & Health
operates with the support of the
Ontario Workplace Safety &
Insurance Board.

WSIB Workplace Safety &
CSPAAT Insurance Board
Commission de la sécurité
professionnelle et de l'assurance
contre les accidents du travail