

at work

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

This Issue

For Workplace

Institute hosts RSI conference; Health & Safety Scorecard being developed

For Policy

New publication on workers' compensation; '99 Congress papers to be published

For Researchers

WSIB holds research conference; Institute work with WMSDs highlighted

This Issue's Supplement

The evolution of the contemporary workplace has resulted in a new world of work. The more we understand about the relationships between work and health, the better we will be able to address future health concerns. The Institute is currently involved in a number of projects examining the usability of population-level comparative health indicators.

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



**Research Excellence
Advancing Employee Health**

Institute launches expanded, audience-focused web site.

To celebrate the millennium, the Institute has completed a digital makeover of its web site, www.iwh.on.ca.

The new site is easier to use, allowing visitors to quickly find what they are looking for. The new keyword search, along with two other search methods, will also help users pinpoint information of interest. The new site has nearly five times the content of the old.

Currently, visitors can access selected summaries of Institute publications as well as other research-focused material. There are also short biographies of Institute scientific staff and detailed project summaries. Back issues of the Institute's newsletter, *At Work*, are available on line, and there are major sections on the recent International Congress on Medical-Legal Aspects of Work Injuries and the Cochrane Collaboration Back Group.

The redesign of the site is part of the Institute's Research Transfer (RT) strategy to provide stakeholders with specific information about its research. The RT staff, along with site designer Kurt Krumme, have worked to make the Institute's web presence an effective tool for providing up-to-date and useful information about the research. ▲



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.

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Some Workplace News



CONFERENCES ENCOURAGE INTERACTION ON RSI

During the last two years, the Institute has sponsored two Future Search conferences on work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSD), also known as RSI, and is now making plans for a third in the Spring of 2000 that will focus on success stories.

Michael Polanyi, the lead researcher on the Search Conferences has recently defended his Ph.D., which examined the effectiveness of the Future Search process.



Michael Polanyi

Future Search is a way of bringing together people who have a stake in an issue, although they may have competing values and interests. It creates a safe environment so all are free to express their viewpoint. These meetings allow participants to gain a new understanding of a difficult issue while focusing on common ground and generating new action and theory.

At the two conferences, attendees included workers, employers, policy makers, insurance companies, injured workers, health-care workers, worker compensation people, designers and engineers, labor, educators, government representatives, researchers and the media.

The participants agreed that WMSD is a difficult issue, and that it can be contentious, confusing, frustrating, and ambiguous. There were different levels of understanding of what causes WMSD. Some people thought it was individual behavior, some thought it was the fault of bad ergonomics at workstations while others believed broader workplace and societal conditions were at fault.

The participants came to agreement on some issues while others stayed unresolved. Common ground was reached on accepting that WMSD has multiple causes, that there is a need for education, for the different stakeholders to come together, for more research, and for best practices to be identified. The process also helped participants become more accepting of what it means to be an injured worker.

Twenty months after the first conference, seven of the 12 action groups that were formed are still active, and networks have been established between groups that usually do not interact. 🏔️

Michael Polanyi may be reached by e-mail at mpolanyi@iwh.on.ca. For a list of Institute publications on WMSD/RSI, 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.

MEASURING WORKPLACE HEALTH

The Institute is developing two "healthy workplace" performance assessment tools: an Employee Survey on Stress, and a Health and Safety (H&S) Balanced Scorecard. The survey questionnaire is based on the 1994 Statistics Canada National Population Health Survey (NPHS), incorporating questions on both the causes and effects of stress. Aggregated results of the employee survey can provide a measure of an organization's performance relative to Canadian norms for the working population. The results can achieve even greater validity by taking into account important co-variates of health indicators, such as employee age, gender and socioeconomic status.

The second tool under development, the Health & Safety (H&S) Balanced Scorecard, is inspired by the Business Balanced Scorecard which is widely popular among general managers. The business scorecard balances a group of financial outcome indicators with indicators predictive of these outcomes - indicators of internal business processes, customer perspective and organizational learning & growth. The H&S Scorecard likewise balances H&S outcome indicators with job- and workplace-level indicators predictive of these outcomes. This approach is consistent with the recommendation of safety system performance management experts that 'upstream' predictive indicators be measured as well as 'downstream' indicators such as injury rates.

The H&S Scorecard can provide many benefits. It can present an at-a-glance overview of health & safety in the organization and help focus strategy on key determinants. The scorecard can also help operationalize a H&S strategy, communicate it up and down an organization, provide essential data for operational managers, and contribute to the improvement of H&S outcomes.

Management and labour representatives have given general support through interviews with Institute researchers for the development of a H&S Balanced Scorecard, especially one which allows the choice of indicators to be customized to any workplace. The interviews also found that two organizations, both leaders in safety, have already developed safety balanced scorecards for their workplaces.

Ongoing development of the two "healthy workplace" performance assessment tools is supported in part by the Health Evidence Application and Linkage Network (HEALNet), one of the Federal Government's Networks of Centres of Excellence. 🏔️

For further information **Lynda Robson, PhD, Principal Investigator**, can be reached at Irobson@iwh.on.ca or contact **Laura Maniago** (416) 927-2027 Ext. 2101 or by e-mail: info@iwh.on.ca.



INJURY AND THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

Over the last fifty years the nature of work and work injury has changed dramatically. The new publication, *Injury and the New World of Work*, edited by Institute President Terrence Sullivan, provides a practical compilation of the latest developments and research on workers' compensation.

The book includes fourteen original essays – written by experts in public health, sociology, anthropology, epidemiology, nursing, psychiatry, management, economics, public policy, and labour studies.

Four general challenges to the workplace and the compensation system are explored: the dramatic rise in disability associated with the changing nature of work, methods of preventing injury and disability, evaluating rehabilitation, and the difficulty of reconciling fairness for workers and economic sustainability in a competitive era.

Injury and the New World of Work examines a broad range of research solutions and policy options for dealing with the

challenges of workers' compensation. The essays draw on recent case studies and original empirical work from Canada, situating them within a comparative international frame of reference.

This 384 page book volume is a product of the University of British Columbia (UBC) Press and may be ordered through Raincoast Books, Vancouver, British Columbia. Raincoast Books may be reached by phone at 1-(800) 663-5714 and by fax at 1-(800) 565-3770. For more information about the volume, contact UBC Press by e-mail at: info@ubcpres.ubc.ca. The ISBN of the publication is 0-7748-0747-4. ▲

1999 CONGRESS PAPERS TO BE PUBLISHED

A number of papers presented at the 4th International Congress on Medical-Legal Aspects of Work Injuries have been brought together and published in a special double edition of the *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry: Work, Stress and Disability in the New Millennium*.

This collection of eleven original articles explores two broad issues: how changing work arrangements create stress and ill health; and how compensation schemes are adapting to trade liberalization and regulatory retreat alongside increased stress claims. The collection was edited by Terrence Sullivan, president of the Institute for Work & Health, and Stephen Adler, Judge and president of the National Labour Court of Israel.

The 4th International Congress was hosted in Toronto last spring by the Institute for Work & Health. This congress brought together more than 500 delegates from 22 countries to discuss the current approaches to work-injury issues related to prevention, rehabilitation and compensation.

The International Journal of Law and Psychiatry is published by Elsevier Science (usinfo@elsevier.com). This special issue, Volume 22, Issues 5 & 6, was published in December of 1999. Contact Elsevier for ordering information. ▲

For more information on the International Congress contact **Laura Maniago** by phone: (416) 927-2027 Ext. 2101 or by e-mail: info@iwh.on.ca. Abstracts of the papers presented at the Congress are available on our web site: www.iwh.on.ca.

Important Research News



WSIB CONCLUDES RESEARCH CONFERENCE WITH CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Dr. Robert Norman, Chair of the Research Advisory Council (RAC) of the Workplace Safety & Insurance Board (WSIB) has announced a Request for Proposals



Robert Norman

(RFP) for funding from its Solutions for Workplace Change initiative. The call for proposals follows the successful completion of the 1999 RAC conference, *Connecting Occupational Health & Safety Research to the Workplace: Focus on Priorities*, which took place in Toronto on November 16.

The RAC conference included workshops on workplace design, fair compensation and other health care and compensation issues. The workshops gave participants a chance to meet the researchers who received funding

from the WSIB under the 1998/99 program and helped the RAC to focus its research priorities for 1999/2000 funding.

The Solutions for Workplace Change research initiative seeks to uncover and provide new information to help prevent work-related injuries and illness, improve diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, return-to-work, and fair compensation of injured workers, and help ensure fair assessment of employers. Information about the RFP and proposal guidelines may be obtained from the WSIB web site (www.wsib.on.ca) or from the WSIB Research Secretariat (Henry_Hao@wsib.on.ca). The deadline for receipt of proposals is February 7, 2000.

THE INSTITUTE LEADS THE WAY ON WMSDs

The Institute has become one of the leading research facilities investigating work-related musculoskeletal disorder (WMSD), also

known as RSI. WMSDs are common and costly, making up a quarter of all compensation claims and costing up to \$1.5 billion in Ontario alone. These injuries are still very controversial and poorly understood.

Dwayne Van Eerd, a Research Associate at the Institute, recently gave a presentation on the Institute's multiple research projects into WMSD to information technology researchers and developers. The presentation took place at the Centre for Advanced Studies' "Meeting of the Minds" conference, sponsored by IBM.

The Institute is involved in researching WMSDs at many levels

- ▲ A series of Future Search conferences has been held to engage numerous stakeholders in a quest for common understanding on WMSDs.
- ▲ An intensive, three-phase, workplace-based project is on-going at the Toronto Star, with managers, union and researchers working collaboratively on this problem. (To be continued on page 4 ➡)

LINKAGES

In October, the Institute hosted a group of researchers, employers and labour representatives from Norway who were interested in patterns of sickness absence and approaches to absence management and return-to-work. The group were in Toronto as part of the 3rd International Congress on the Scientific Basis of Health Services, chaired by John Bienenstock, a former Institute board member.

GRANTS

Institute scientists Mieke Koehoorn and Donald Cole, along with Clyde Hertzman from the University of British Columbia, have received funding from the Workers' Compensation Board of British Columbia. Their project will investigate risk factors and patterns of health care utilization associated with musculoskeletal injuries among a group of BC health care workers. Project funding is through WCB-BC's *Finding Solutions* program which is designed to provide financial assistance to support research and educational projects which are directly related to the operational goals of the Board.

APPOINTMENTS

The Board of Directors of the Institute are pleased to announce the return of Glen Wright to the board. Mr. Wright has recently been reappointed as Chair of the Ontario Workplace Safety & Insurance Board after a short absence.

AWARDS

Pierre Côté, a Research Fellow at the Institute, has been awarded the 1999 Canadian Chiropractic Association's *Researcher of the Year Award*. Dr. Côté received the Award at the CCA President's reception during the CCAs semi-annual meeting in November.

(← Continued from page 3)

- ▲ An industry-wide research project has just been launched in the clothing industry that will include 35 unionized clothing manufacturers.
- ▲ At the methodological level, the Institute is reviewing the current systems of classifying WMSD, and has compiled a 30-item questionnaire that measures disabilities of the arm, shoulder and hand (DASH).

Van Eerd concluded his presentation by emphasizing that both physical and psychosocial factors are important causes of WMSD, and that prevention practices are the responsibility of all stakeholders. 🏔️

*For more information on the presentation contact **Dwayne Van Eerd**, dvaneerd@iwh.on.ca. For a list of publications on WMSD/RSI contact **Laura Maniago** by phone: (416) 927-2027 Ext. 2101 or by e-mail: info@iwh.on.ca. You can also visit our web site: www.iwh.on.ca.*

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

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Issue #14 January 2000
ISSN # 1261-5148

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