

## **The Value of the Occupational Health Nurse (OHN) in Mental Health Disability Management**

The value of expertise is become more evident in the management of disability in the workplace.

Employers attempting to address the increasing incidence and impact of illness, injury and disability in the workplace have realized significant benefit when accessing the services of an Occupational Health Nurse. The management of complex illnesses such as mental health illness especially benefits from access to an OHN.

Occupational Health Nurses are uniquely positioned to understand the workplace, health care system and current diagnostic and treatment modalities. The OHN acts as an advocate for the employers need for business continuity, the employee's right to care and confidentiality and can access early and appropriate illness management interventions as indicated.

The medical and health care communities respect and welcome the role of OHN in the workplace. Medical practitioners can communicate and liaison directly with the OHN while maintaining patient confidentiality. Employers have access to appropriate information concerning the employee's ability to return to work and exercise their legal obligation to maintain medical confidentiality. Labour management relationships are collaborative when an OHN is recommending medical evaluation referrals and intervention strategies.

The OHN is considered an integral partner of the team returning employees to return to work after a mental health illness. The OHN maintains regular communication with the employee, supervisor and attending medical practitioners. This key role of the OHN increases the opportunity to facilitate and achieve desired outcomes for employees returning to work.

Occupational health Nurses can make the difference when addressing mental health illness management in the workplace.

Submitted by: Shelly Ptolemy RN OHNC CHRP, Occupational Health Nurses of Canada.