



the window

views on organizational
health + safety + wellness

Fall 2006

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IF SOMEONE ASKED YOU WHETHER YOUR WORKPLACE WAS HEALTHY, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

According to workplace health expert Dr. Graham Lowe, nearly one in six of us in Canada say our workplace is unhealthy (Lowe, 2004). Since we spend about a third of our time at work, we all have a vested interest in the work environment around us. And we all have a role to play in creating a positive and healthy workplace culture.

Leaders, managers, supervisors, human resource professionals, and many others have responsibilities for the workplace. But as an employee, you have the opportunity to make a positive difference at work.

Here are just a few ideas to consider:

- Show respect for and take an interest in your colleagues
- Share the workload
- Celebrate team accomplishments
- Focus on the positive aspects of your workplace
- Reflect on your own actions and behaviors and make sure they are contributing to a healthy workplace

@the window

Editorial Board

If you have any ideas, or comments for future issues of @ the window or would like to contribute an article, please contact a member of the editorial board.

- Joan Parks-Hubley, Chair ■ PSC
- Valerie Wadman ■ Community Services
- Holly Cameron ■ Environment & Labour
- Wanda Pierrynowski ■ PSC, EAP
- Jeff Brett ■ NSGEU
- Adele Poirier ■ Communications Nova Scotia
- Patti Pike, Executive Champion ■ PSC
- Sarah Hansworth ■ Education
- Marriam Nauman ■ PSC
- Joanne MacPherson ■ CUPE



OCCUPATIONAL
HEALTH + SAFETY

HEALTHY WORKPLACE



Public Service Commission

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

- Support initiatives launched by your Healthy Workplace Committee
- Take responsibility for your own physical and mental health
- Work safely and participate in your department's OH&S program
- Recognize colleagues' contributions and successes

October 23 to 29, 2006 is Healthy Workplace Week. This year the theme is "Make a Difference in the Workplace" (see www.healthyworkplaceweek.ca).

Look for our new resource "Put Health on the Agenda" on boardroom tables, in lunchrooms and offices across the province. Also, visit www.gov.ns.ca/psc/healthyworkplace

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."

- Mahatma Gandhi

Caregiving & the Workplace



JANET* HAS BEEN EXHAUSTED AT WORK lately. And no wonder. After a full day in the office, she goes home to a long night of diaper changes, feedings, bath time, and housework. But at 58, Janet's not a new mother. She's caring for her own mother who has Alzheimer Disease.

According to research done by the Healthy Balance Research Program (www.healthyb.dal.ca), 36 per cent of adults in Nova Scotia provide care to a parent,

**Janet is not a real person. Her story is an amalgamation of several caregivers'.*

spouse, or child suffering from a long-term condition, mental illness, frailty, or disability.

More caregivers are joining Janet every day. Nova Scotia's aging population is the second highest in the country and our rates of chronic illness and disability are increasing. Advances in health care mean people are living longer with illness and disability, and more care is being provided at home.

All of this adds up to thousands of Nova Scotians trying to quietly balance the responsibilities of work and caregiving.

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As they shoulder their caregiving responsibilities, employees are also suffering from burn out.

The Nova Scotia government wants to be a preferred employer that attracts and retains the best people by offering a healthy, safe and supportive workplace. One way to do that is by finding ways to support caregivers in the workplace, says Joan Parks-Hubley, Co-ordinator, Healthy Workplace Programs at the Public Service Commission (PSC).

In order to begin that process, the PSC piloted a program called "Striking a Balance: Caregiving and the Workplace" in May 2006. This eight-week program was facilitated by Gail Bruhm, BSW, GNT, and Mary Anne Nardecchia, BScN, RN of CareStrategies (www.carestrategies.ca).

"Providing care is a big energy user and it will affect one's ability to perform," they say. "Learning how to prepare for the role of caregiver will ultimately benefit a person, enabling them to carry on with work obligations."

Joan Cottell of Nova Scotia Fisheries and Aquaculture and Tim Delaney, from the Department of Agriculture took part in the program. Over the course of eight sessions, they learned how to acknowledge and identify the stresses they were under as caregivers,

develop their own caregiving plans, and coordinate appropriate resources.

As Joan says, the program gave her great peace of mind. "I feel I'm better prepared now. We were given a checklist of where to go for information about nursing homes, wills, finances and everything."

She also liked the fact that the program focused on self-care. "We learned that you can get caught up in caregiving and become sick yourself," says Joan.

Tim thinks this course is essential for anyone in his age bracket. "I'm in my mid-40s," he says. "My parents are in their mid-70s. My caregiving responsibilities aren't too intense now, I just help out a bit with lawn and house maintenance, but they're only going to grow. Now I have the resources for when that day comes."

The program is now part of the PSC's training calendar, open to anyone in government, with the first course starting November 1 & 2.

"We also want to raise awareness in the workplace so that managers and co-workers can understand the issues people are facing," said Joan Parks-Hubley. "This will be important to creating a work environment that supports and retains valuable employees who love their jobs, but need to care for their loved ones, too." ■



PREMIER'S AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

Recognizing Excellence

Would you like to highlight a colleague or team of colleagues for the outstanding dedication and skill they bring to public service?

The inaugural Premier's Award of Excellence event was held earlier this year. At the event, the premier presented awards to employees who exemplified the exceptional work carried out by public servants on a daily basis.

The nomination period for the 2007 Award is now under way and closes on December 6, 2006. An external selection panel will evaluate all nominations and award recipients will be announced at a ceremony in June 2007. For more information, contact Lisa Palermo (424-4459), or send an e-mail to premiersaward@gov.ns.ca. You may also visit the website at: www.gov.ns.ca/psc/recognition. ■

OHS Training

More Convenient. More Relevant

THIS FALL, the Nova Scotia government is taking a new approach to Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) training. A number of OHS training courses have been put together for all government employees, union members, and their employers. Training will take place throughout the province on several different dates, making it easier for people to pick a date and location that works for them.

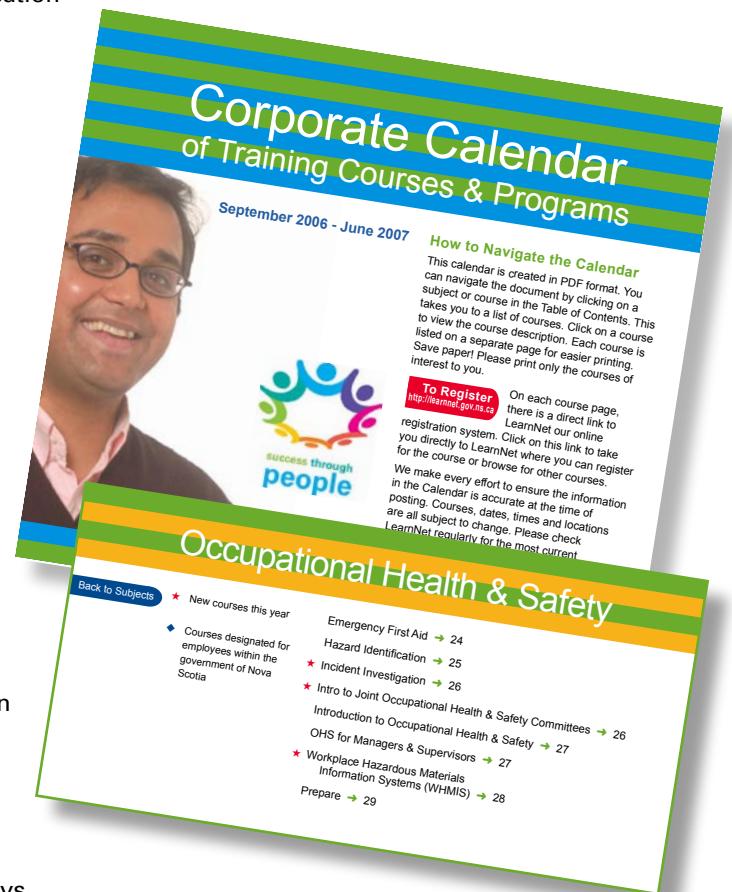
As Gail MacClare, OH&S Consultant with the Resources Corporate Services Unit explains, the curriculum has been specifically organized and developed for government, making it more meaningful to the participants.

That's something that Jeff Brett, OHS Officer, NSGEU, is pleased to see. He believes this new approach will be more friendly and familiar in content and scope to government and public sector employees.

"It's safe to say the union will welcome this initiative and help promote it," Jeff says.

Some of the courses in the calendar are mandatory and others are recommended. Darren Schives, OHS Consultant for the Public Service Commission, feels it's important to take them all to support the Corporate Human Resources Plan. "Government wants to provide a safe and supportive workplace—a healthy workplace," says Darren. "If you have a good knowledge of how to keep yourself, your family, and your co-workers safe, you're a long way down the road to having a healthy workplace."

The new training calendar was launched in September and can be found at www.learnnet.gov.ns.ca. All employees, union members and organizations that are part of NSGEU will be able to log on and register for the courses of their choice. ■



The Importance of Being Prepared



IMAGINE THE POWER HAS BEEN OUT FOR DAYS.

It could be a week before it is restored. Trees lie sprawled across streets and sidewalks. You have no food and no cash. You walk through the chaos to the only functioning ATM in your community. After waiting in the hour-long lineup, you discover that due to the power outage, your paycheck was not deposited into your bank account.

Disasters and emergencies can and do happen right here at home. Nova Scotians have only to think back to Hurricane Juan and White Juan to envision the scenario described above. With these and other events such as Hurricane Katrina fresh in our minds, we are reminded of the importance of being prepared. Individuals and businesses alike can take steps to prepare for an emergency.

Individuals should prepare to be self-sufficient for a minimum of 72 hours following a wide-scale emergency. Have an emergency kit and develop an emergency plan with your family.

On a larger scale, business continuity planning (BCP) will minimize disruption of essential services in a time of emergency or disaster, such as a weather event or a flu pandemic.

Planning involves identifying necessary resources including key personnel, information, equipment and infrastructure and then putting safeguards in place to maintain critical government services during

emergencies or disasters. Once the plan is in place, it is important that procedures are accessible and understood by all employees.

The Provincial Emergency Management Office has assembled a seven-member BCP Team. They provide assistance and guidance to all departmental Emergency Planning Officers. Together, they are working to develop a standardized and documented business continuity plan.

Taking proactive steps will help reduce potential risks and effects of an emergency on individuals, businesses and communities. For more information on individual preparedness and BCP, visit www.gov.ns.ca/emo. ■

Mental Health & the Workplace



TODAY'S HOLISTIC WORKPLACE HEALTH SYSTEMS

provide support on many levels—physical, social, personal and developmental—to improve overall quality of life both within and outside the workplace for employees.

We know that workplaces are making strides in providing their managers and employees with information about good nutrition, exercise, adequate sleep and stress management. While interventions help support, maintain, and promote good mental health, research indicates that in order to improve workplace health, employers must make concentrated efforts to deal with mental health issues.

The Department of Health has a working group that is focusing on mental health in the workplace—specifically depression among public and private sector employees—for the next several years. It's called the Promotion, Anti-Stigma/Discrimination, Prevention Advocacy Working Group, or PAPA for short.

A look at the trends in Canada explains why the group's focus is important:

- 1 in 5 individuals has a diagnosable mental illness
- Stigma and discrimination are barriers to early identification and treatment

- Annual losses to the economy due to mental illness are \$33 billion
- The economic burden of mental illness on the workplace is \$14.4 billion
- 75% of the short-term disability claims are related to mental illness
- 79% of long-term disability claims are related to mental illness
- The fastest growing category of disability costs to employers is depression
(*Mood Disorders Of Canada, May, 2006*)

Research suggests 80 per cent of depressed individuals respond well to treatment and the earlier they are treated, the less chance of relapse. Yet we know that about 90 per cent of individuals who are depressed never seek treatment.

PAPA is convinced that awareness, education, and culture change for employers, employees, and families must occur to help create a healthy workplace and to curb the escalating cost to business.

In 2006-2007, the PAPA Working Group will be piloting awareness and education materials and tools with volunteer groups within the public and private sectors.

Investing in mental health is the right thing to do. ■

TONY PRIME, PROJECT OFFICER,
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH BRANCH

Breast Cancer

It's Never Too Early To Take It Seriously



OCTOBER IS BREAST CANCER AWARENESS

MONTH and Karen Michael King's co-workers have a team in the "Run for the Cure." Karen really appreciates the effort. She's a young wife and mother, an occupational health and safety specialist for the provincial government, and she's battling breast cancer. Karen says she's hearing more about young women, in their late 30s and younger, with breast cancer.

Dianna Schreuer, patient navigator for the Nova Scotia Breast Screening Program, says breast cancer "does seem to be on the increase in younger women—for whatever reason." Every year, more than 21,000 Canadian women are diagnosed with breast cancer; 23 per cent of them are now below the age of 50. And, of the 4,500-plus women diagnosed between the ages of 20-49 last year, more than 900 were under 40.

"If you're outside the age group for a mammogram—which is younger than 40 in most of Canada—and you find a lump, investigate. Dig, claw and scratch until you find out what it is. Don't settle for a pat on the head and a: 'Don't worry, you're too young...' because you're not too young." Dianna, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1989 at the age of 43, also advises younger women not to rely on breast self examination alone. "Make sure it's not just a 'feel' thing—really look at your breasts."

Karen feels her worst mistake was assuming because I was just turning 40, it (breast cancer) wasn't an issue. "I wasn't into the yearly mammogram yet, there isn't a history of it in our family, and I was not into the routine of self examination." Now she's focused on getting better and has advice on how to support colleagues and friends battling breast cancer.

First: don't make assumptions. "Everyone has a different treatment and reacts differently."

Second: don't judge: "Just because I can work, don't judge the person who can't."

Third: be aware that well-meaning inquiries and efforts to be kept "up to speed" can create stress for others.

"My husband, Brian, and I were getting inundated with kind questions about how my treatment was going," Karen recalls. Her solution? "I set up a blog online detailing how I'm feeling and what's happening. Now I tell people: 'If you want to know anything, go to my blog site.'" So when we see someone on the street, we can talk about my kids, their kids—not breast cancer. Energy-wise, it works better."

A supportive manager also helps. Karen's manager allowed her flexible hours, and the ability to work from home when required. And thoughtful co-workers gave her gifts geared to making everyday life a little easier—treats she and son, Declan, really enjoyed.

The gap in the support, Karen feels, relates to her husband. "There's probably more stress on him. Everything is focused around me, and our son Declan, and the cancer. A lot of people don't understand that the person who's caring for someone with breast cancer needs support too." ■

You can visit Karen's blog at:

<http://ca.blog.360.yahoo.com/blog-NmwVy9E6dqp2DZJXEiWv>

EAP and Confidentiality

Confidentiality is the cornerstone of the Nova Scotia Government Employee Assistance Program.

- 1** EAP staff cannot release any information without the employee's written consent
- 2** EAP files are not part of personnel, health or other employee records
- 3** No one outside of the EAP staff has access to EAP files
- 4** EAP staff have access to a separate database for EAP use only
- 5** Employees who have accessed the program are under no obligation to inform anyone in the workplace that they have done so
- 6** Each employee's case file is destroyed seven years after the case has been closed
- 7** Service providers (counsellors) are given an EAP client file number to use to invoice EAP (no names)
- 8** Invoicing occurs quarterly to departments through HR and EAP client file #'s are used (no names)
- 9** Departments are given only statistical information about use of EAP—names of users or their location (which region/office) are never released

For information about EAP and confidentiality, please call 424-7948 or 1-800-777-5888.

WANDA PIERRYNOWSKI, RSW, EAP CONSULTANT

Take Back the Lunch Break Walk

ON JUNE 29, provincial employees in Bridgewater, Bible Hill, Sydney and Halifax Regional Municipality took back their lunch breaks with group walks.

In Sydney, the weather cooperated for the first annual Take Back the Lunch Break Walk and 14 employees from different departments participated. Everyone had a positive attitude arriving at the start point at Wentworth

Park. Many in the group are members of a walking club, and they set a strong pace.

Walk organizer Terry MacPherson with Environment and Labour believes walking is a great diversion from time to time. "It also helps build links among provincial employees and their departments and agencies," he says. "We're looking forward to our next event." ■



Success Stories in Wellness

WHAT SEEMED LIKE AN INCONVENIENCE turned out to be something quite different.

When Metro Transit drivers were on strike May 1996, the only way to get to work was to walk. It seemed like such a big task that I wasn't too happy about. But on the other hand, it was a little exciting as well! What time should we leave in the morning? How long would it take to get downtown to the Johnston Building for arrival time of 8:30 a.m.?

My friend, Mary, also worked in the Johnston Building and decided to walk with me. We met at a specific location at 7:30 a.m. and proceeded from there. It took an hour to reach our office building. At the end of the day, we walked home. At first, we were very tired when we reached our destination but as time went on, we didn't mind it at all.

That was more than 10 years ago and we still walk to work most of the time. We walk in the heat of the sun or with our umbrellas in the rain, and sometimes during the winter months.

Walking provides all kinds of benefits. My endurance is a lot better than other people much younger than I am. I have lost weight over the years and feel good about that. Our friendship has grown stronger as we talk about all kinds of subjects all the way downtown! And we see all kinds of sights, too.

I would recommend walking to anyone. All you need is a good pair of sneakers. Why not park your vehicle in the shopping mall or grocery store parking lot a little farther from the entrance? It will only take a few extra steps to reach the door. ■

MARY MACKINNON, TOURISM, CULTURE AND HERITAGE

AT THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION, we offered health risk assessments for our staff that gave them their own individual information, and gave us an overall picture of our employees' health. We learned that the top health risk factors were nutrition and weight management. So the Healthy Workplace Committee organized sessions on the Superstore Healthy Living Plan.

Weekly meetings were lead by a Superstore dietician from May to July. Each week, we went over a chapter in our binder and were given a healthy snack, all provided by Superstore. The dietitian told us about Superstore products that would be healthy alternatives to some relatively unhealthy choices we'd been making. Staff could also get weighed if they wished (most of us didn't).

Some people came to lose weight and others to learn about healthier food choices. I came for both and was not disappointed. I found the sessions to be uplifting and fun. It was great to learn about products that we can buy at grocery store prices to help with goals of either weight loss or maintenance of present weight.

My family has healthy eating habits at home, so they didn't see a big change in the food they eat. The bigger change was my eating habits during the day. I changed portion size and what I was eating for lunch and snacks.

I was a success story and lost more than 30 pounds. I am now thinking more about what I eat, but also allowing myself to live with my new choices so that it will be a long-term weight loss. ■

TRACEY BARKHOUSE, PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

We think Mary was successful because she:

- incorporated walking into her daily routine
- set realistic goals for her level of fitness
- enjoys the social support of a friend
- made changes she could live with over the long term

We think Tracey was successful because she:

- Ate a variety of foods from Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating
- Limited portion size in meals
- Ate low fat and low calorie snacks and lunches
- Had strong group support and encouragement
- Made changes she could live with for a lifetime