



OHS conference examines mental health issues in workplace

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Activists from around the province gathered in early June for a conference on occupational health and safety.

The OHS conference provided an opportunity for OHS and Enhanced Disability Management Stewards to come together, share experiences and find solutions to health, safety and injury prevention concerns in their workplaces. Seventy-five activists spent time in plenary sessions and workshops discussing a wide range of issues important to HSA members.

Participants were encouraged to review the effectiveness of their joint occupational health and safety committees by ensuring that:

- committee members are properly engaged in incident investigations;
- all sites have disaster and emergency plans in place;
- all committee members are accessing the education they are entitled to in order to properly fulfil their roles;

Several members provided examples of innovative projects they're involved with in response to specific workplace needs, including high injury rates among cardiac sonographers in Victoria, a violence risk assessment for Providence Health's Inner City Youth Program, and dealing with mental injury in stressful and sometimes violent community settings.

Presentations from WorkSafeBC Manager of Industry Services, Stephen Symon and HSA Workers Compensation Board Advocate Natalia Bryant reviewed the statistics and trends related to mental disorder claims and complaints of harassment and bullying.

Nearly one-third of mental injury claims received by the WCB come from the health and social services sector, even though our sector represents less than 12 per cent of the total BC workforce. In 2015 more than 2000 work-related mental injury claims were filed from healthcare workers. Increasing costs due to workplace mental injury have forced employers and governments to acknowledge that psychological health and safety is an important workplace issue.

The final portion of the conference was set up to provide guidance on the implementation of Resolution 58, recently adopted at the 2016 HSA Convention. That resolution has the following goals:

- raise awareness about workplace causes of mental injury;
- pursue measures to prevent mental injury, including working to have all employers adopt the Canadian Standards Association national standard on psychological health and safety;
- continue to support members experiencing mental illness and injury

This resolution is based on an understanding that HSA has a role to play in ensuring employers provide a psychologically healthy and safe workplace – one that promotes psychological well-being with systems in place to prevent harm to employee psychological health due to neglect, reckless or intentional acts. Direction provided by conference participants will greatly enhance the union's ability to meet these goals.

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