

BULLETIN

Karim Kanji, radiation therapist

November 24, 2014



HSA REPORT, DECEMBER 2014

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There's no doubt that having to take time off work due to an injury or illness brings a multitude of challenges.

Aside from the medical demands, there are forms to fill out and anxiety around getting the proper benefits. There are often feelings of isolation. There is the uncertainty of not knowing when, how, or if you can return to work.

Since November 2013, HSA has been providing the Enhanced Disability Management Program (EDMP), a support program for members facing these challenges. Karim Kanji, a radiation therapist at the BC Cancer Agency, has been an EDMP representative since the program's inception. During that time he's seen first hand how providing consistent and holistic support leads to better return-to-work outcomes, reduces disability costs, and minimizes stress for both employee and employer.

"If you can engage at an early stage and keep an ongoing connection between the employee and the workplace, that helps facilitate a timely and safe return to work," says Karim, who is one of 12 EDMP representatives in BC.

Karim took on the .5 position because he wanted to help other HSA members, he says. "Members often don't know about support and services available. My role is to facilitate communication between the disability

advisors at workplace health and the employee, so that members understand the process."

The program addresses all the barriers to returning to work - medical, personal, workplace and vocational. This could mean arranging re-training, making sure the right equipment is in place, or looking at ways to promote supportive interpersonal relationships at work, all as part of creating and following a graduated return-to-work program.

Also, Karim helps clients to understand the various forms required, the benefits available in the collective agreement, and lets them know about other potential sources of financial support. Because the program is still quite new, sometimes HSA members are hesitant, says Karim. "Some employees are worried that they have to provide their whole medical history to the employer. So I need to explain the parameters of the program and that confidentiality is paramount. Workplace health receives the medical, but the manager and department are only provided with any limitations and restrictions so that an appropriate graduated return to work or other support and services can be offered."

In the past year, Karim has handled approximately 100 cases. "The most satisfying part of it is when I get feedback from members saying that they have appreciated the support and advocacy I have provided. I feel good knowing that I am making a difference in a member's disability journey."

The desire to make a difference was Karim's main motivation for embarking on a career in health care 17 years ago. "I actually used to be a lending officer," he explains. "But I found that banking was becoming too much of a sales oriented environment. I didn't want to be selling people something they didn't need. And I'd always gravitated towards helping roles." He trained at the BC Cancer Agency's radiation therapy program (this course is now offered by BCIT).

"I love the opportunity to make a difference in a cancer patient's life, just by giving them a gentle touch or a smile. We treat a patient every 12 minutes. During that time we have to deliver treatment, provide education, and make sure the treatment is accurate and correct. If I can make a genuine connection and offer support during that time, they really appreciate that," says Karim, demonstrating the compassion and empathy that motivates his work as both a radiation therapist and an EDMP representative.

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