

Therapeutic colouring and other strategies for promoting OH&S

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ABOUT SHAI



I have been working at the BC Cancer Agency as a Cytotechnologist for 10 years and in that time, I've learned about the union and what opportunities are available to its members. I first became a steward in 2013 and then later trained to be an Occupational Health and Safety Steward. Since then, I have been an active member of our JOHSC, advocating for and providing information and resources to my colleagues on matters of health and safety.

THERAPEUTIC COLOURING AND OTHER STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

BY SHAI LAL, HSA MEMBER

As cytotechnologists, my co-workers and I do a lot of our work sitting down at our work stations. Among us, there were regular, informal conversations about general aches and pains. About two years ago, ergonomics arose as a safety issue.

I'm an active member of our Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC), which meets every month to discuss and tend to workplace safety concerns, and do monthly safety inspections. The committee represents different departments on multiple floors. Ergonomics became a priority for our JOHSC.

We performed ergonomic assessments for the entire lab. We wanted to see if people were sitting with proper posture. We made sure our desks and chairs were adequate, and that everyone was taking breaks and moving around periodically. Studies have shown that static posture is very unhealthy, and over time can cause deleterious effects.

Stemming from this, a number of people had their work areas professionally adjusted. New chairs were purchased in some cases, and ergonomic support equipment was made available if needed.

From physical to psychological health

Recently, mental health has become a hot-button topic. Psychological health and safety is becoming an increasingly important priority for both employees and employers, particularly with the development of the

CSA standard for Psychological health and safety in the workplace.

And in 2012, the province passed Bill 14, the *Workers Compensation Amendment Act*, which established a “mental disorder” – in effect, psychological injury – as compensable by the Workers’ Compensation Board (WCB). The act establishes particular parameters for claims of this nature: they must be the result of a traumatic event(s) taking place over the course of employment or caused by workplace stressor or stressors, and the injury must be diagnosed according to the provisions outlined in the act.

The act excludes injuries resulting from decisions made by the employer pertaining to the employer’s work. It does, however, consider workplace bullying and harassment as potential grounds for injury. The amendment to the act served as a salient reminder to the importance of good workplace mental health.

Psychological health and safety has become a particular interest of mine.

Psychological health impacts our ability to think, feel, and behave in a manner that allows us to function in our work environments, our personal lives, and society at large.

I have been introducing this concept to my colleagues, as well as to my managers. With so many variables that can affect an individual’s baseline behaviour, it can be hard to strike a balance between work and home demands. Sometimes stepping back for a moment can help, but sometimes more supports are needed.

We have been trying to get the conversation started to break the stigma that surrounds mental health issues. My latest effort was the Bell’s *Let’s Talk* campaign.

I set out literature about mental health and put out colouring pages in the break room, so people could really take a break when they are in that space. It’s been said that colouring has therapeutic qualities, and it’s true - I’ve tried it and it works. There was tremendous positive feedback from this initiative, and I plan to add more activities to our break room, including puzzles and games.

In the coming months, our JOHSC will be hosting an open house for our building. We will take this opportunity to let people know about what we do (e.g. safety programs, fire safety, earthquake information), as well as providing information about mental health resources.

Personally, this has been a really rewarding experience and has allowed me to continue learning and in a strange sense I feel that I am a very, very tiny cog in a giant machine. I am grateful to be able to do my part.

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