

BULLETIN

Guarding minds at work

March 10, 2015

HSA REPORT, MARCH 2015

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Workload and stress are among the most serious workplace challenges of our time.

As a union, we're seeing an increasing number of members, from all professions, paying a terrible price for this. Compromised performance, increased illness and disability wreak havoc on professionals, their families, and the health care system itself.

We all need to do a good job taking care of ourselves, but that's not possible if employers aren't supportive. And while there is a growing recognition of the importance of mental health in the workplace, we still have a long way to go to establish practices to sustain mental health.

That's why HSA has been using a survey tool called Guarding Minds at Work. It's designed to gather information from members about psychological health and safety in their workplaces. The program was developed by researchers from the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA) within the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University on the basis of extensive research, including data analysis of a national sample and reviews of national and international best practices, as well as existing and emerging Canadian case law and legislation.

Last fall, Guarding Minds at Work questionnaires were circulated to all HSA members with email addresses, and over 1000 responded to the 68 question survey.

HSA is now analyzing results, comparing responses from different employer groups, writing a report and making recommendations for various initiatives to be undertaken - as a union and with the employers we deal with.

We're optimistic about the process. Members are going to benefit, but employers will too. A 1998 study estimated the annual cost of mental health problems to the Canadian economy at \$14.8 billion; more recent estimates put the cost as high as \$35 billion. Studies also reveal that when employers adopt policies and programs to address psychological health and safety, they incur between 15 and 33 per cent lower costs related to psychological health issues. And that's good for patient service too.

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