

ADVANCE

Tools, ideas and news for people on the front line of workplace mental health
from the BC Business and Economic Roundtable on Mental Health

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More than 300 GPs now training to provide mental health therapy

BC's supply of primary health care practitioners qualified to provide therapy to employees with depression, is expanding rapidly.

In February, the BC Medical Association's Society of General Practitioners and the Province's Ministry of Health confirmed — with the support of the province's psychiatrists — that GPs would be offered training workshops to enable them to offer enhanced mental health treatment to their patients.

As of June, 300 GPs had enrolled in 18 training workshops. The BCMA forecasts that by the end of this fiscal year, some 700 GPs and their office staff will graduate from the program.

According to the BCMA's Liza Kallstrom, the program has now trained 45 GP "champions" or facilitators; these physicians have begun to conduct grass-roots training workshops for local GPs and their assistants.

The new program will arm GPs to provide Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) to people suffering from depression. CBT is a psychotherapeutic approach aimed at "influencing dysfunctional emotions, behaviors and cognitions through a goal-oriented, systematic process."

CBT's effectiveness in treating certain forms of depression has been recognized by numerous authorities including the U.K.'s National Institute For Health and Clinical Excellence.

CBT therapy has been offered for some time by many BC psychiatrists and psychologists, but until now it has not been part of the arsenal of BC's largest single group of primary-care physicians, namely GPs.

Lloyd Craig, Roundtable Chair, says the new program "will significantly expand the number of health care practitioners able to assist employees suffering from depression. Since depression is the number-one cause of worker disability, the arrival of a large number of 'fresh troops' to help affected employees is a tremendous good news story for this province."

"The government, the BCMA and the Society of General Practitioners deserve much credit for embarking on this important initiative."



INSIDE: BC therapists launch new, free web-based service to support employers who want to improve workplace mental health; background and an interview with the authors

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New web-based “guide to psychological safety and health” provides free workplace mental health solutions

Service targets employers, employees, human resources teams

A team of SFU-affiliated researchers and therapists has created **Guarding Minds @ Work (GM@W): A Workplace Guide to Psychological Safety and Health** as a public resource for employers across Canada. Its goal is “to provide managers, supervisors, union representatives, human resource teams and other business leaders the tools they need to assess risks to psychological health in their workplace and implement effective and lasting solutions.”

The program operates at www.guardingmindsatwork.ca

The authors say “safeguarding mental health in the workplace is emerging as an ethical and legal obligation in Canada - one that calls for a proactive approach on behalf of Canadian employers.” They add that “a psychologically safe and healthy workplace minimizes threats to employee mental health while actively promoting the emotional well-being of employees.” Use of GM@W, they say, will help employers to reduce absenteeism and disability claims while enhancing staff loyalty and productivity.

GM@C is based on the authors’ research into evidence-based best employment practices and responds to the results of a national survey on mental health in the workplace conducted by Ipsos Reid Ltd. Based on comprehensive research into evidence-based best practices, GM@W is intended to detect risks to the psychological safety and health of employees, while providing strategies for addressing these risks. The employer can adapt each step to its organizational needs.

Employers can use the resources of the website free without external involvement. Further consultation and training is available for employers seeking enhanced services from the development team behind this program in order to enhance uptake, customize implementation and improve evaluation.

The program was designed by SFU-affiliated researchers Dr. Joti Samra, Dr. Merv Gilbert, Dr. Martin Shain and Dr. Dan Bilsker, working with Simon Fraser University’s Faculty of Health Sciences and the Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare.

Development of the program was commissioned by the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace and funded by Great-West Life through The Key to Giving™ - the national corporate citizenship program of Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life.



Why is GM@W needed? What gaps will it fill?

We interview development team member Dr. Merv Gilbert

Isn't employers' need for workplace mental health information already being met by others (the Great-West Life website, disability insurance providers, etc.)?

Many employers recognize that attending to employee psychological health and well-being is the right thing to do both ethically and economically. But they don't know where to start or whether the efforts they are making actually work. For this reason, the GWL Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace commissioned the development of GM@W to assist employers in identifying 'hot spots' in their workplace, determining practical actions they can take and evaluating the effectiveness of their efforts. The actions they choose may include external services and programs as well as the development or revision of internal processes — for example, creation of a respectful workplace policy.

What specific need of employers is it designed to meet?

It was developed to help Canadian employers assess and address workplace factors known as "psychosocial risks" — risks that impact the psychological safety and health of their employees. When employees' psychological health is compromised it can lead to increased organizational costs, conflict and liability. On the other hand, psychologically healthy workplaces demonstrate greater productivity, sustainability and resilience.

The program reflects recognition of the importance of psychological safety and health for the workplace given increasing associated financial and productivity costs and emerging legal and regulatory changes. With GM@W, we're making it possible for Canada to join countries such as Denmark, the United Kingdom and Australia who have been developing national and regional standards for organizational safety and health in the psychological arena.

Do you expect employers to be able to develop mentally healthy workplace policies and programs by using the website "stand-alone", or will some employers will need consulting support in order to fully implement this process?

GM@W is freely available for any Canadian employer, public or private, large or small. It can be easily accessed and used without any external involvement. However, some employers (particularly those that are larger and/or those who want a third party assessment) may wish support in preparing for, or conducting, Guarding Minds @ Work. They can contact us at info@guardingmindsatwork.ca.

Who will supply the consulting support?

Members of the team are available to provide consultation. Over the coming year we'll will be conducting field trials of GM@W that will include consultation.

