

History & Inception of GM@W

Guarding Minds @ Work grew out of a focus on workplace mental health that has emerged in the past couple of decades. Although business organizations have known for many years that mental health problems are significant issues in the workplace, only in the last 20 years has it become clear that actively dealing with workplace mental health problems is absolutely necessary. Reasons for this include:

- **Increasing recognition in Canadian law that employers must minimize the contribution to the development of mental health problems from workplaces with high psychosocial risk.** Dr. Martin Shain, an Ontario-based social research consultant and expert in legal aspects of mental health protection in the workplace has been a leader in carrying this message to employers and policymakers: “The protection of mental health is gaining recognition as an integral part of workplace safety and health, due to developments in human rights and employment standards legislation as well as in the law of torts, contract and collective bargaining. The duty to provide a psychologically safe workplace is emerging as an inescapable ethical and legal obligation for Canadian employers”. From this increased recognition has come the need for a realistic way to monitor and evaluate the psychological safety of workplaces so that policymakers can set meaningful standards and so that employers can monitor psychosocial risk and ensure their organizations’ compliance with appropriate standards.
- **Increasing awareness on the part of employers that mental health problems in the workplace lead to substantial costs and have a significant negative impact on the bottom line.** The Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health has had a major role in raising awareness of the economic impact of mental health problems in the workplace. From this increased awareness has come the need for practical strategies to identify mental health problems in the workplace and implement appropriate remedies in order to better manage costs.
- **Increasing understanding on the part of mental health providers and researchers that the workplace must be taken into account, both for its possible effect on triggering or worsening mental health conditions and for the impact that mental health conditions may have upon an individual’s ability to function effectively in the workplace.** Unless workplace stress and functioning is specifically targeted by interventions, an essential aspect of the individual’s mental health is being missed. Researchers affiliated with the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University (Dr. Joti Samra, Dr. Merv Gilbert and Dr. Dan Bilsker) have, over the past decade, carried out a series of

“knowledge translation” projects to raise understanding of workplace mental health among employers, policymakers, researchers and clinicians. From this increased understanding has come the need for readily accessible tools to help organizations assess psychological health and safety in a user-friendly way that leads directly to practical intervention strategies.

Late in 2007, Dr. Martin Shain approached Great-West Life’s Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace with a concept that, once developed, would provide a comprehensive set of resources to assess and address risks to mental health embedded in the organization and design of work. Dr. Shain coined the term “Guarding Minds” to underscore the importance of locating the protection of mental health at work within the legal framework of occupational health and safety. Great-West Life realized that the lines of development described above were converging and proposed that a team be formed with its base at SFU to carry this idea forward.

In early 2008, the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace commissioned the creation of a practical, web-based employer resource, with the generous funding support of Great-West Life Assurance Company. As a state-of-the-art approach, Guarding Minds @ Work is designed to meet the needs of Canadian employers, employees, policymakers and clinicians for a practical and easy-to-use set of resources for assessing psychosocial risks in the workplace and generating practical yet powerful interventions to remediate these risks and improve the quality of workplace mental health. In 2012 GM@W was revised to ensure that it remained current with emerging research, practice and regulatory developments, including the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.

The core GM@W development team consisted of Dr. Joti Samra, Dr. Merv Gilbert, Dr. Martin Shain and Dr. Dan Bilsker. They received invaluable assistance from administrative personnel, research assistants and colleagues at CARMHA, as well as expert consultation from national and international labour, research and organizational leaders.