

## Mental health and stigma

Special newsletter in support of Mental Health Week (May 6-12, 2013)

A message from the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, and Mrs. Johnston was issued on the occasion of Mental Health Week 2013. In the message, they encouraged Canadians to break down the stigmas associated with mental illness so that people with mental health problems can be helped and we can build a healthier society (Johnston, 2013).

At ERGO-Wise, we salute this message. Through working with our clients who are preparing to return to work following a mental health disability leave (usually due to depression, burnout, anxiety), we see firsthand the impact that mental health disabilities can have on employees. As well, we are aware of the stigma associated with mental health issues.

Indeed, the added stigma associated with mental health issues further contributes to a person's emotional fragility and readiness to return to the workplace (Kirsh, et al., 2009; Stuart, 2004). Stigma is identified as an issue in today's workplaces and is a contributing factor to employees not divulging their condition or accommodation needs which can affect return-to-work success (Kirsh, 2000; Krupa, et al., 2009; Moll, et al., 2008; Rebeiro-Gruhl & Laporte, 2008).

Our unique *cognitive work hardening* program helps clients come to terms with the reality of today's workplaces. The program addresses a broad range of functional issues that people with depression face in the workplace which are critical for resuming job duties and achieving return-to-work success. These include the cognitive skills required to assume job duties and meet work demands, the coping skills required to manage work-related stress and deal with interpersonal issues, and the overall stamina and functional ability to adhere to a work schedule.

Our clients achieve success in these areas so that they are functionally prepared to return to work. In addition to the functional gains that clients attain at ERGO-Wise, they are also helped to deal with their anticipated return. This can include assistance with developing assertiveness skills, handling conflict, as well as learning about different personality types and effective communication styles.

In spite of their gains, clients are concerned about the workplace environment that they will be returning to. They worry about the reception they will receive upon their return. They are concerned about the



Work Information Newsletter is developed by Adeena Wisenthal, registered occupational therapist and owner of ERGO-Wise, a centre in Ottawa that specializes in workplace mental health.

This issue is in support of Mental Health Week. The focus is on the stigma associated with mental health. Special attention is given to the stigma that is prevalent in today's workplaces in spite of ongoing efforts to dispel myths and misconceptions around mental illness.

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### Mental health impacts occupational performance...reducing stigma helps!

Effective workplace mental health initiatives reduce stigma and facilitate healthy work functioning.

Education is essential to better understand mental health and to promote an accepting culture at work.

Cognitive work hardening, a targeted return-to-work intervention, prepares employees to return to work following a mental health disability leave.

*We can all be part of the solution*

## Mental health and stigma

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stigma associated with mental health and the reaction they will receive from bosses and colleagues. They question their chances of promotion given that they were on a mental health disability leave. Many believe that this will remain a black mark against them.

By heeding the call of the Right Honourable Governor General, David Johnston, we can help with the plight of mental health sufferers. We can all be part of the solution rather than contributing to the problem.



Bell Canada urges us to get the facts!

1 in 5 Canadians will experience a form of mental illness at some point in their lives.

... Canadian Institute of Health Research

2 in 3 people suffer in silence fearing judgment and rejection.

... Canadian Medical Association

Only 49% of Canadians said they would socialize with a friend who has a serious mental illness.

... Canadian Medical Association

27% of Canadians are fearful of being around people who suffer from serious mental illness.

... Canadian Medical Association

Reference: <http://letstalk.bell.ca/en/the-facts>

### References

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ERGO-Wise specializes in workplace mental health. Through our hallmark **cognitive work hardening program**, we focus on return-to-work preparation which assists clients to develop the cognitive skills they need to meet job demands. It also provides the structure and work routine needed to prepare for transitioning back to work. Specific skills such as assertiveness, time management, and organizational skills can be part of the program as well.

Clients who are not ready for return-to-work preparation benefit from **re-activation** through working with a registered occupational therapist. Setting goals to increase activity and functioning pave the way for life re-engagement which can lead to readiness for return-to-work preparation.

Services are provided within a non-clinical simulated work setting.

[ergo-wise.com](http://ergo-wise.com)