

The Development of a Business Case to Support the Employment of People Living with HIV and Other Episodic Disabilities

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Episodic Disabilities and Employment

- Episodic disabilities are lifelong conditions that are characterized by periods of good health interrupted by periods of illness or disability
- Periods may vary in severity, length and predictability from one person to another
- Examples of episodic disabilities include multiple sclerosis, arthritis, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, chronic fatigue syndrome, migraines, chronic pain, and some forms of cancer and mental illness.



Prevalence of Episodic Disabilities

Increasing number of Canadians are living with lifelong episodic disabilities. It is estimated that today:

- Over 4 million Canadians are living with arthritis
- 20% of Canadians will experience an episode of mental illness in their lifetime
- Between 55,000 and 75,000 Canadians are living with MS
- 65,000 Canadians are living with HIV

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cd-mc/musculo/arthritis-arthrite-eng.php>

http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cd-mc/mi-mm/mi_figures-mm_figures-eng.php

http://www.mssociety.ca/en/involved/advocacy/socact_brief_fin2010PreBudgetConsult_Aug09.htm

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/aids-sida/publication/survreport/estimat08-eng.php>



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“Evolving the Workplace: Identifying Opportunities to Support People with Episodic Disabilities in Employment”

- CWGHR undertook survey and key informant interviews with employers, researchers, policy makers, disability organizations and people living with episodic disabilities
- 170 survey participants included people living with episodic disabilities, managers/supervisors and HR professionals
- Survey and 9 key informant interviews were conducted in order to determine:
 - Knowledge of episodic disabilities and employment accommodation strategies
 - Current employment activities
 - Needed support for further capacity building in the area of episodic disabilities and employment
 - The experiences and needs of people with episodic disabilities who have intermittent work capacity



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Different Perceptions of Workplace Capacity

- Different stakeholders had differing perspectives on the level of knowledge and availability of accommodations and supportive workplace practices.
- Employers and people living with episodic disabilities who are currently employed viewed employer knowledge as high and supportive workplace policies and practices as widely implemented.
- In contrast, disability organisations, academics with expertise in this field and people living with episodic disabilities who were not currently employed viewed employer knowledge as low and supportive workplace practices as not widely implemented.



Awareness

“How long do employers have to accommodate?”

- Noted lack of awareness regarding episodic disabilities generally and the kinds of accommodations that might be utilised to support someone staying in or gaining employment
- This was raised by all survey stakeholder groups as a critical barrier to employment participation



Productivity

“The challenge with regard to employment practices is the need to serve clients and accommodate employees at the same time.”

- Issues related to productivity concerns were raised by all survey stakeholder groups
- Some employers could not conceive of why they should hire someone knowing they had an episodic disability: productivity was thought to be lower and level of absenteeism and need for supports higher
- People living with episodic disabilities saw these perceptions as a significant barrier to being hired or retained in the workforce
- Expressed concern that abilities were overshadowed by stigma relating to their disabilities



Workplace Hostility

“Why should they get a preference?”

- Survey participants reported co-worker resentment or hostility related to the perception that accommodations (flex hours, working from home) as a type of favouritism
- Employers reported difficulty dealing with requests from non-disabled workers to be treated ‘the same way’
- People living with episodic disabilities reported being afraid to disclose their disability and request accommodations due to negative comments from co-workers and managers



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Training Needed

“Managers should be educated about the various types of disabilities and how it may affect the person and the workplace.”

- All survey participants were asked about training topics and formats that would address knowledge gaps
- Training is particularly needed for managers and supervisors of people with episodic disabilities
- General awareness raising regarding what episodic disabilities are and how people living with them can be accommodated in the workplace is needed as well



Some Recommendations

- New Training Resources:
 - What episodic disabilities are, how they may manifest within a workplace environment and the appropriate accommodation strategies to address them
 - Address concerns regarding absences and productivity, particularly within certain types of industries (for example, within those requiring 24 hour staffing and those relying on billable hours)
 - Targeted to front-line managers and supervisors to better explain how episodic disabilities should be managed within a workplace environment
 - Answer the question: Why should employers hire a person with an episodic disability?
- ***A clear business case for hiring people with episodic disabilities was viewed as a critical initiative.*** The development of the business case should be undertaken through a consultative and research informed process and should invite a number of stakeholders to be involved



Why a Business Case?

- Many people with episodic disabilities are already employed when they have their first episodes
- *Not* accommodating workers with an episodic disability costs business in:
 - Lost talent and investment in training
 - Higher turn-over and rehiring costs
 - Human rights non-compliance penalties
 - Corporate reputation
 - Staff loyalty and morale



Development of Draft Business Case

- CWGHR collaborated with Chronicle Analytics on development of 'Return on Investment' argument
- Paper was disseminated to business contacts, HR professionals, employers, disability organizations and people living with episodic disabilities for feedback.



This Business Case Assumes...

- Disclosure of the need for accommodation (not a diagnosis) before productivity is heavily impacted
- The provision of appropriate accommodations that are flexible and adjusted when needed
- With these two conditions met the argument is made that there will not be a drop in productivity and therefore the employer will benefit from **increased retention, legislative penalty avoidance and the indirect benefits of accommodations**



Business Case :The Formula

Positive Return = Measurable Benefits
(i.e. increased retention)
– Accommodation Costs
+ Legislative Penalty
Avoidance (i.e. cost of non-compliance)
+
Indirect Benefits of Accommodations
(i.e. on other workers)



More Work Needed

- Initial feedback on this business case has suggested that even if all of the assumed factors were met, there may still be drops in productivity/intermittent absences related to living with an episodic disability
- Need for additional research/data collection related to economic impact of episodic disability on employers



Business Case Feedback

- CWGHR is requesting feedback on this business case and input to strengthen the model
- See www.hivandrehab.ca for Business Case Summary
- Please contact Wendy Porch (wporch@hivandrehab.ca) with feedback

