



PACIFIC COAST UNIVERSITY
FOR WORKPLACE HEALTH SCIENCES

Andrew King

Andrew King, LLB, recently retired as director of health, safety and environment for the National Office of the United Steelworkers of Canada (USW) and is currently studying for a post-graduate law degree.



He was on the NIDMAR Board of Directors at the time the PCU-WHS Statute came into force and says that the University is a vehicle to bring about change – in the workplace and in the way we educate our future professionals. He brings labour representation to the Academic Council, guaranteeing that the interests of working people will be represented. King says that the university is all about systemic change. The statute provides a voice to labour in the educational process by legislating equal employer-worker representation.

Since early in his career, a significant portion of King's practice was representing injured workers, even dating back to his days working as a student legal aide representative. Performing advocacy work is typically part of the program in law school, and his student work with disabled workers shaped his career when he entered legal practice, not long after which he joined the Steelworkers.

What made NIDMAR different was the use of a consensus-based approach, bringing together a full range of perspectives – employers, labour, healthcare professionals and disabled persons – to bring about change in the workplace. And in the late 1990's, NIDMAR was involved in a nine-country study looking at return to work strategies. This was followed by an agreement with the International Labour Organization (ILO), a United Nations body in Geneva, to develop the first Code of Practice for Disability Management.

King headed up the Committee to draft the first Code of Practice and, after it was presented to the ILO by Canada's federal Minister of Labour, he was chosen to go to Geneva along with other labour, employer and government representatives from 22 countries, where he chaired the labour committee reviewing the Code. In 2002, the ILO published the first international Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace. The Code has since been translated into 35 languages.

King said one of the problems in the field of disability management and return to work is that there are simply too many compartments and too little communication between them. The recurring theme is "breaking the silos." It's about creating the intellectual exercise to connect the dots and to promote health. All of it is connected to the way work should be organized. We need a Universal Design that integrates the needs of the people who are doing the work.

For his part, King said it is crucial that labour has been given a seat at the table as PCU-WHS develops as the world's first specialized school for the field. It is important that labour's perspective is integrated into the educational process. Individual rights are important, but it is also important for people to be able to act collectively.