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## **DE-MEDICALIZED or FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO RETURN TO WORK AND DISABILITY MANAGEMENT PRACTICE**

The presentation briefly explores pros and cons of the traditional, or medically-focused, protocols for analyzing disability management and return to work challenges and offers an alternative approach, based on a broader analysis of an individual's life context.

The presentation further examines the main features of most common disability management/return to work protocol, where a medical professional serves as a “gate-keeper” thus controlling access to benefits and resources, as well as return to work efforts. Contractual, organizational and inter-personal limitations inherent in this approach are discussed in detail. Subsequently, a three-dimensional screen, also defined as “**MVP Model**”, is proposed taking into consideration **m**edical, **v**ocational and **p**ersonal aspects of individual circumstances leading to a health-related absence and often a long-term disability claim.

Utilizing “iceberg phenomenon”, the MVP functional model proposes an alternative strategy for effectively analyzing conscious and unconscious choices and decisions made by individuals when faced with a difficult health issue and/or a disabling condition. The model is applied to both physical and psychological health concerns and the resulting disabilities.

The presentations briefly reviews research data shedding light on the Canadian healthcare system and the functional impact its current design has on the relationships between medical professionals, patients and their families, employers, unions, short- and long-term disability insurers. When exploring this rather complex and dynamic process, a number of variables influencing the outcomes of a medical intervention are discussed, including: catastrophizing, patients psychological reaction and the frequent self-induced conditioning for negative outcomes, common myth of a “complete recovery”, hurt versus harm, providers' professional bias, funding models, etc. The issue of secondary gains is also reviewed and placed in the context of systemic, personal and societal needs.

When exploring job accommodation and return to work planning, the presentation strongly favours a functional and collaborative approach over a clinical, or diagnosis-driven, one. The role of a healthcare provider is therefore described as a partnership in a multidisciplinary team context, rather than as a leader or a sole authority, which used to be the case in more traditional approaches and administrative structures.

Since it offers a viable alternative to the current, often strongly adversary, position-focused and ineffective, approach, the presentation is relevant for employers, insurers but especially for return to work and disability management professionals. This Medical-Vocational-Personal concept provides the involved parties with a functional platform to effectively address the often complex challenges associated with the ongoing need to share practical information between healthcare providers and employers' representatives, while ensuring that the individual's personal and medical information remain confidential.

The presenter has Master's Degrees in Rehab Medicine and Clinical Psychology, and is a Canadian Certified Rehabilitation Counsellor (CCRC). He has acquired extensive knowledge in disability management and workplace health program development coordination over the last 25 years, through working in the public and private sector, including major insurance companies and municipal government. He offers workshops and presentations at industry conferences and seminars across Canada and abroad, as well as teaches on-line disability management courses.