



Chris Hartmann

The practical professional

By Katherine Abraham, Hons. BA



He may not have taken the most common route to vocational rehabilitation but it could be argued that it was one of the most practical routes. After graduating from high school in Prince George, British Columbia, Chris Hartmann spent a year toiling in the sawmill construction industry. He worked alongside a 63-year-old carpenter who had returned to the physically demanding profession after recovering from quadruple bypass surgery. It was here that Hartmann witnessed the determination of the human spirit and the seed of vocational rehabilitation was planted.

Hartmann completed a bachelor's degree in Physical Education from Trinity Western University in his native BC before he returned to work in sawmill construction. Hartmann

recalls of his experience there, "It was a job where I had first-hand experience with many injuries, some quite serious, and as I look back now, all of them were preventable." Being witness to these accidents and seeing how they affected his friends and co-workers certainly made an impact on Hartmann. After another year on the job, Hartmann returned to school, this time at Western Washington University, where he completed a master's degree in Exercise Physiology with a focus in Cardiac Rehabilitation. And in 1997, he obtained his Canadian Certified Rehabilitation Counsellor (CCRC) designation.

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Hartmann's first foray into the vocational rehabilitation profession was somewhat of a chance occurrence. After spotting a job posting in a local newspaper, Hartmann submitted his résumé without even really understanding what the position was. In 1990, he started his new job as a vocational rehabilitation consultant with the Worker's Compensation Board of British Columbia. "I thoroughly enjoyed the job; particularly, visiting all the different workplaces and

getting the opportunity to work along with injured workers and assist them in overcoming the effects of a workplace injury," says Hartmann.

It has been 21 years since Hartmann first started in VR and he is still happily working with WorkSafeBC after climbing his way through the ranks to his current position as Regional Director (since 2006). Hartmann has been witness to some significant changes in the profession and he notes that over the past 20 years "the development of formal academic programs continues to establish a base on which the profession can build." In British Columbia alone, there are several university and college programs where anything from certificates to Master's degrees can be earned in areas such as vocational rehabilitation counselling, disability management, and rehabilitation management. "I am very proud of the fact that WorkSafeBC has played an integral role in the establishment of most of these relatively new programs," says Hartmann.

As Hartmann contemplates the future of VR, he reflects on his past, "Each time [a former client talks about his return to work journey] it is a powerful reminder of how important we are to the people who need us the most. It reinforces that while a client may be one of 40-60 clients to us, for them, their Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant is one of one." ☐



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