

MA – Rehabilitation Committee Who are they & what do they do?

By Linsay Buss.

It's not surprising that many union members and even shop stewards aren't aware there is a jointly-appointed Rehabilitation Committee in the Master Agreement. Unless you were off work with a serious, long term illness, or knew someone else in your workplace that required an accommodation, there might not ever be a need to know about it. However, if you ever do suffer the misfortune of being struck with a disabling condition, the Rehabilitation Committee may become the most important resource in the collective agreement that you have ever had to rely on.

The Rehab Committee consists of representatives from the union and the employer, including: a BCGEU staff representative and an elected officer; a Disability Case Manager (DCM) and a Corporate Advisor from the Public Service Agency; and a representative from Occupational Health Programs (OHP). OHP chairs the Committee meetings and provides medical advice based on examinations and worksite assessments. A secretary is assigned to assist in the administration of the Committee. All information is considered strictly confidential.

The Rehab Committee has been designed to assist workers return to gainful employment, whether it's their own occupation or an alternate one. The Committee reviews return to work plans and makes recommendation to the ministries on how rehabilitation will progress.

For example, if a worker was unable to return to their own job, the Committee, through the ministry, may arrange necessary training to place them in rehabilitative employment in another occupation. When the training is completed, they may be referred to Article 13, in the collective agreement, to access priority placement options.

The Committee reviews cases of all regular employees who have completed their initial probationary period and are no longer capable of performing all the duties of their own occupation due to illness or injury. They may still be at work or off on Short Term Illness (STIIP). If they have been accepted on a Long Term Disability (WCB) claim, the process is mandatory.

The Rehab Committee also reviews cases of workers on WCB claims; WCB runs concurrently with STIIP and LTD. Auxiliary employees have no access to the Committee unless they are on a WCB claim, in which case they are entitled to *9 months review before the Committee* once they have been deemed ready to return to work.

And finally, the Rehab Committee reviews requests for transfer on compassionate grounds. This would not normally involve the worker's own medical condition, but may involve the medical condition of another family member who requires a relocation to be

closer to a treatment center. Or the situation may involve a safety issue and the worker needs a move because their life is in danger.

Compassionate transfers are very difficult to have approved. The Committee considers each one very seriously and requires substantive backup information, such as police reports or Dr's letters. Once approved, the worker should get the next available vacancy, after other priority placement considerations. Relocation expenses do not apply.

In the process of returning to work, in either their own job or another, there are a number of steps which may be taken. These steps will vary with each worker, but may include;

- Getting written clearance to return to work from their physician;
- Developing a plan with their manager or supervisor for their return to work;
- Asking for a referral to Occupational Health Programs (OHP);
- Making formal application to the Rehabilitation Committee.

In order to make a formal application to the Rehabilitation Committee, workers should contact their Human Resources representative or BCGEU shop steward/staff representative.