



In 2013, during the year of the 10th anniversary since first signing a licensing agreement to offer the professional certification examinations, the DGUV (German Social Accident Insurance) renewed their agreement for another five years. Since 2003, the DGUV has been holding professional certification examinations for the designations of CDMP and CRTWC annually, and there are approximately 1,350 individuals in Germany, with about 3,000 in 12 countries holding the professional designations, which are administered under the auspices of the International Disability Management Standards Council.

To commemorate the licensing renewal, Dr. Joachim Breuer, Chief Executive Officer of the DGUV, provided his views on the challenges, milestones and highlights of the last 10 years with a look forward to the future.

Photo L to R:

L to R: Dr. Joachim Breuer, Chief Executive Officer, DGUV, and Wolfgang Zimmermann, Executive Director, NIDMAR, which is the Secretariat for the IDMSC

Germany's DGUV Renews License Agreement Extending Certification Commitment to 15 Years



DGUV reaches key milestones

Disability management has really taken off in the past few years. We have registered a continuously growing demand and have cooperation with partners in Switzerland and Austria. Today, Germany is one of the most important champions of disability management in the world with the highest number of disability managers. One should add that the process of implementation was accelerated considerably by the law on return to work, which entered into effect in Germany in 2004.

The excellent quality of the program has been central in creating acceptance in the market. We are working hard to keep training materials and examinations up to date and include new and relevant content such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities an important subject for disability managers.

To date, approximately 1,350 individuals have been certified as disability managers, of which 900 are continuing to work in the field. Most of them are responsible for implementing return to work management procedures in companies, either as an employee of the company in question or as a provider of services to the company.



Overcoming challenges of converting the curriculum for a German market

While the development of disability management professional and program standards was an international effort, adapting it to the specific needs of German workplaces was not easy. It meant more than just translating texts. All modules and questions had to be adapted to a German background. Moreover, boards and institutions for exams and certification had to be created. The University of Cologne has proven to be an excellent partner in this context.

I am convinced that the longstanding history of German Social Accident Insurance and its one-stop-shop approach to managing rehabilitation and return to work also played a huge role in giving disability management a bit of a head start in Germany. When we introduced disability management in 2002, the high quality of our services was confirmed by the fact that 200 of our case managers were able to pass the final exams for disability management without additional training.

Offering direct benefits to society under the ISSA Guidelines

The big advantage of the International Social Security Association (ISSA) Guidelines is that governments now have a blueprint. This blueprint can be used by institutions of social security to create an infrastructure that helps to ensure the employability of the workforce. In many countries, this blueprint arrives just in time; many nations in the world cannot rely on immigration to solve their demographic problems. They have to improve the employability of their people, which often means improving their health and ability to work. Not only will this enhance the economic outlook of these countries, it will also make them more attractive for foreign investment. The ISSA Guidelines translate into a direct benefit for companies and workers.

Sharing the benefits of globally accepted, consensus-based DM standards

Companies that want to invest in disability management and return to work programs can be sure that these programs correspond to globally accepted standards and that these standards are consensus-based, which means that they are accepted by both workers and employers. Workers, too, can be sure that the return to work programs offered to them by social security institutions follow a standardized and tested approach.

Envisioning the future in the evolution of DM and RTW

From my point of view, three aspects are particularly relevant to the continuing evolution of DM and RTW. First of all, we must find a way to make global disability management and return to work standards compatible with the diverse cultural contexts we find in the world.

Second, we must continue to promote international cooperation. The ISSA Guidelines are only a beginning. Disability management and return to work, for example, could complement strategies of other international organizations like the International Labour Organization (ILO). The Code of Practice for Disability Management could be developed further, for instance. Moreover, there is the thriving cooperation with Rehabilitation International—an organization that brings together all those active in rehabilitating people with disabilities.

Third, we need initiatives that aim at fostering the worldwide collaboration of medical practitioners and therapists, and experts for workplace design and relations. This means that we will have to convince not only those parts of government responsible for labour and social security of the advantages of disability management and return to work, but also the competent institutions for public health. Only then will we manage to create successful national strategies and an international development of social security, which serves the interests of companies and workers.

In this context, it is important to promote a concerted approach of institutions and experts responsible for occupational safety and health, workplace health promotion, and return to work. Education and training offered by NIDMAR, or within the context of the ISSA initiative, must follow an integrated approach, because only comprehensive information and consultancy will ensure the satisfaction of governments, companies, and workers.