

WORK ADAPTED FOR ALL. MOVE EUROPE (2011-2013) - THE LAST INITIATIVE OF THE EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR WORKPLACE HEALTH PROMOTION

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It was estimated (WHO) that the number of people over the age of 60 will double between 2000 and 2050 - from about 11% to 22%. Consequently, related health care costs will rise significantly. Therefore, it is important to search for possibilities to maintain health and mental health with age as well. There are many programs as well as activities organized institutionally aimed at health promotion including the national health promotion programs. It is well known that the level of health promotion within the European countries is influenced by a broad range of factors including individual behaviour and lifestyle, the health care system, social, economic, environmental and biological factors. Because a large part of our life is spent at work and the pension age reaching date increases it is clear that very important factors become the activities and programs aimed to promote health at the workplace. The European Commission supports, through its agencies, a number of projects aimed at promoting health whose goal is to maintain a person's health as long as possible. Stay in the workplace can directly affect our health because we spend there in average 40% of the year time in it. The workplace is a good place where one can positively affect the lifestyle and reduce the effect of risk factors on our health.

The European Parliament has issued in 2002 a decision, in which it notes that into the activities aimed at promoting the health by public health institutions must be involved the research institutions also which have to transmit the results of their research activities into daily practice. The Institute of Normal and Pathological Physiology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (INPP SAS) is one of the European few institutions of the basic research in the field of medical science aiming to develop the integrated view on selected physiological mechanisms of the human body, which are crucially involved in maintaining the health. This Institute is the Centre of Excellence for the study of the regulatory role of nitric oxide in the diseases of civilization and is specialized in research of activities of cardio-vascular and nervous systems in normal and pathological conditions. Cardiovascular and nervous system are the two systems of the human body, which are very important for management of demographic changes, of economy level, and of aging and increasing date of pension age reaching. In 2005 the Institute was appointed as the national contact office of the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP).

Healthy Employees in Healthy Organizations is the vision of the ENWHP since it was established in 1996. The ENWHP activities are focused on the improving public health standards in Europe, in which workplaces play a very special role. According to the Luxembourg Declaration (1997) the Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) is the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work. This can be achieved through a combination of: improving the work organization and the working environment, promoting active participation and encouraging personal development (ENWHP Image Brochure 2013, Secretariat European Network for Workplace Health Promotion, Leuven).

Since 1997 with the support of the European Commission, DG Health and Consumer Protection, the ENWHP is carrying important European initiatives which have established workplace health promotion (WHP) as a field of action for public health at European and national levels. The last one, the 9th initiative of the ENWHP and its campaign entitled: *Work. Adapted for all. Move Europe (2011-2013)* was co-funded by the European Commission under the Public Health Programme (2008-2013). The objective of this initiative was to promote healthy, suitable work for employees suffering from consequences of a chronic illness - either through enabling job retention or by supporting their return to work (RTW).

According to the WHO definition a “chronic disease” is: “any illness that means health problems, requiring on-going management for a period of years. Chronic diseases are diseases of long duration and generally of slow progression.” Common chronic diseases are diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cancer, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, hepatitis, HIV, and especially mental disorders. The Community Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC 2008) reports that about 24 % of the working age population (EU 27) suffers from at least one chronic health restriction. The respective proportion of the chronically ill in the working population (19%) is remarkable. Once pension age is reached, two out of three people are suffering from at least two chronic diseases. Such status could be positively influenced by very well organised programmes for the health promotion which are part of the corporate culture.

Under the leadership of Prevent, Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, the aim of the last ENWHP initiative was, among others, to convince the European stakeholders and the enterprises that investing in programmes to support workers with chronic illness and disabilities is worthwhile and to appeal employers to play an active role in job retention and return to work of chronically ill workers. International statistics indicate that one euro invested in programs of health promotion in the workplace is returned to the employer as a gain in the ratio of 1: 2.3 to 5.9 depending on the nature of the workplace. The workplace health promotion programmes are therefore not only of great economic importance but also an important help for employees to maintain their health.

The INPP SAS with substantial help of the regional institutes of public health made a preliminary survey concentrated on the question of whether we have such a Slovak workplace/institution which could serve also as a so-called „Model of good practice“ for other workplaces in the EU Member States in supporting workers with chronic illness in job retention and return to work. After personal consultation with workplace’s departments and study of their social programmes we proposed the ENWHP that even in extremely economically challenging times we can provide such a model. It is very good that the *Centre for ancillary works and activities* of the Železiarne Podbrezová, a.s. fulfilled the sharp conditions, and their program is included in the final book of Models of good practice in the field.

Following lines are from the self-characteristics of the the Železiarne Podbrezová a.s. demanded by the assessing committee of ENWHP: *Creating the Centre for ancillary works and activities shows signs of "good practice". It is an exceptional strategy of Železiarne Podbrezová a.s. The company found the way how to employ workers with disabilities due to chronic illnesses. Without the Centre, the employees with chronic diseases, pregnant women, and others disable employees could not continue to carry on their professions and they would be forced to quit working.*

The company deliberate strategy created jobs and protected employment. Due to joining the center the employees were not expose to the stress situations, while coping with disease and then to stress after returning to the labour market. The main cooperative partners were physicians of occupational health services as well as physicians specialists who have evaluated health of worker. Other important partners were Central Office of Labour, Social Affair and Family and Social Insurance Agency in Slovakia especially in cases of assessment and award a limited ability to work and then invalidity”.

Below are the recommendations arising from the final evaluation of the recent initiative of the ENWHP:

- 1: Focus on the prevention of chronic diseases in the workplace.
- 2: Detect chronic diseases at an early stage.
- 3: The perspective should move from reduced performance to remaining working ability.
- 4: Address discrimination against persons with chronic diseases.
- 5: Raise the importance and priority of RTW on the policy agenda.
- 6: Work must reward.
- 7: Cooperation and systematic cooperation of all relevant players and stakeholders.
- 8: Raise Health Literacy and Empowerment.
- 9: Fill the gap in existing knowledge and extend and maintain evidence and experience based interventions.

These recommendations are set out in more detail in relation to the EU policy and National policies in the brochure: Recommendations from ENWHP’s ninth initiative. Promoting Healthy Work for Employees with Chronic Illness – Public Health and Work published by Christoph Heigl, OÖGKK © European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP), 2013 available at: http://www.enwhp.org/uploads/media/ENWHP_Recommendation_Paper_final.pdf

The promotion of sustainable employability for workers with a chronic disease or disability has no legal support. It will be very good when the insurance companies could help the organizations/companies support financially selected programs for workplace health promotion. It seems that the first step in this direction may be the fact that our institutions and employers will sign the Luxembourg Declaration on Workplace Health Promotion in European Union which is on web: http://www.enwhp.org/fileadmin/rs-dokumente/dateien/Luxembourg_Declaration.pdf. Probably, in such a way we can start a campaign towards the financial support for companies to behave so as it is common in the original EU countries.

See also:

http://www.enwhp.org/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/ENWHP-image_brochure-final.pdf

<http://www.enwhp.org/enwhp-initiatives/9th-initiative-ph-work.html>



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