


Cover Story

Steve Mantis receives the Ron Ellis Award

Research Action Alliance on the Consequences of Work Injury (RAACWI) is proud to announce that the winner of this year's **Ron Ellis Award** is Steve Mantis, Community Lead for RAACWI. The award is presented annually by the workers' compensation section of the Ontario Bar Association (OBA).

The OBA recognizes outstanding contributions and achievements in workers' compensation law. Previous recipients include Ian Strachan (2006), Chair of the Workplace Safety & Insurance Appeals Tribunal, David Gorelle (2005), a founder of the OBA workers' compensation section and the first Ontario lawyer to be certified as a specialist in this field, and Marion Endicott (2004), a community legal representative and a RAACWI community researcher.

Steve has made outstanding contributions not only to the establishment and functioning of RAACWI, but also as a major force in lobbying the government, stakeholders and the Ontario Workplace Safety & Insurance Board for the reform of legislation and policies to improve the situation of injured workers. He has been a part of all of the major law reform initiatives in the past two decades. Steve has dedicated himself to the cause of reform in workers' compensation and occupational health and safety.

Steve was featured in the first newsletter, Volume 1, Issue 1, July 2007. Find out more about Steve from the RAACWI website. 

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Research Feature

Why do some injured workers fail to return to work as expected? The "toxic dose" of system-related problems that confound recovery

By Ellen MacEachen

[Co-investigators include Iggy Kosny, Sue Ferrier, and Lori Chambers]

Why do some lost-time claims last longer than anyone expected? Behind these claims are the actual stories of injured workers. To understand their experiences, Ellen MacEachen and colleagues from the Institute for Work & Health interviewed 69 injured workers, peer supporters and service providers from across Ontario. Their goal was to identify the factors that led to long-term or prolonged claims.

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The Research Action Alliance on the Consequences of Work Injury (RAACWI) is a community-based partnership undertaking research on the workers' compensation system and its role in the economic, social and health consequences of work injury.


"Many workers we interviewed seemed to be typical workers, but they got what we called a 'toxic dose' of more than one problem," says MacEachen. If in addition to an injury, workers had an unsupportive workplace, financial problems and other issues that prolonged their claim, this toxic dose could lead to a spiral of negative events that complicated their claim. In many cases, it also had a devastating personal impact.

"If workers only had one problem they might have been able to proceed as expected. But it's the confluence of problems that tips things against their favour," notes MacEachen.

Although the researchers found some common themes that could prolong claims, each worker's situation was unique. If you were older and already had health problems, if you relied on walk-in clinics instead of a family doctor – these were just a few factors that could affect return to work.

However, all workers needed goodwill from their employers. For instance, an employer might arrange modified work, but this would only succeed if the immediate supervisor was on board and the work was appropriate rather than a meaningless make-work project, or work that was too difficult.

Another underlying problem was miscommunication, which MacEachen likened to a game of "broken telephone." The problems occurred when workers, doctors, employers and adjudicators didn't have an effective or coordinated way of communicating. MacEachen and colleagues are currently developing a new tool to identify "red flags" and "green lights" to help prevent such situations from occurring in the future.

Adapted with permission from the Institute for Work & Health's At Work, Issue 52, Spring 2008 edition. 

How the front-line works in Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board
By Joan M. Eakin
[Co-investigators include Ellen MacEachen, Elizabeth Mansfield, and Judy Clarke]

The interactions between the WSIB and their clients - especially interactions with front-line service workers - are vital to the experience of injured workers and to the process and outcomes of compensation and return to work. Joan Eakin and colleagues conducted a study of the nature of front-line work at the WSIB, in particular the work of adjudicators, nurse case managers and customer service representatives who work with small businesses.

The study took place over two years in two different WSIB offices. Data included in-depth individual interviews with front-line staff and managers, plus observations of daily work life. Additionally, researchers analyzed documents, policies and other public texts.

The researchers found that front-line work is affected in significant ways by the fact that the WSIB is an organization that undergoes constant change and re-alignment. The WSIB is accountable to many stakeholders with often opposing interests. It must balance objectives such as cost control, bureaucratic efficiency, regulatory control and political neutrality. The front-line staff mediates these conflicting objectives for the WSIB, and at the same time serves the often contradictory needs of both injured workers and employers. Across the three front-line jobs, the work involves the delicate management of an assembly-line like flow of involuntary and sometimes unhappy clients in a context of limited, uncertain, and changing rules, policies and resources.

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The study proposes that front-line work is situated within an intricate network of allegiances and obligations, which creates a complexity in front-line work that is often invisible to, and misinterpreted by WSIB clients and administrators. 🌱

Building Academic Capacity

Student Involvement in RAACWI

Claire de Oliveira
RAACWI Student Researcher
Research Associate, Institute for
Work & Health



Claire de Oliveira joined the RAACWI community in 2006 under the Health & Well-being theme. She is a Research Associate at the Institute for Work & Health. Claire holds a master's degree in economics from McMaster University and is finishing her PhD in economics, also at McMaster University.

Her doctoral dissertation examines the relationship between family income and child health. The main objective is to understand the origins of the well-established relationship between income and health status found in the health economics field. From a policy perspective, this research seeks to understand why health inequalities occur at early ages and how these can be mitigated during childhood.

At the Institute, Claire has been involved in several projects that focus on economic evaluation methods for workplace-based occupational health and safety interventions.

Alongside Emile Tompa, Claire's work for RAACWI has focused on the impact of workplace

accidents on marital stress/dissolution and spousal labour-force participation. 🌱

Apply for the Meredith Post-doctoral Fellowship

RAACWI provides mentoring opportunities for graduate students and recent graduates to develop their research skills and research portfolio on the topics and concerns of this initiative. To this end, RAACWI is now accepting applications for the Meredith Post-doc Fellowship, a two-year appointment. This position begins in the fall or winter of 2008.

For detailed information about this Fellowship, including conditions of the appointment and application details, visit:

www.consequencesofworkinjury.ca or
www.iwh.on.ca/about/job_opps_meredith_fellowship.php 🌱

Knowledge Mobilization

Canadian Association for Research on Work and Health (CARWH) Conference

The RAACWI initiative and its researchers were well-represented at the recent CARWH conference held in Montreal this past May. The initiative was featured in the closing plenary of the conference. At the plenary four RAACWI participants (Emile Tompa, Steve Mantis, Marion Endicott, and Pat) spoke about their personal experiences regarding assumptions, attitudes and values that university and community participants bring to such a partnership. They shared the lessons they learned from helping to build the initiative and explored the process and dynamics of learning those lessons. As well, they discussed ways to ensure sustained involvement of the community as the initiative matures and the research intensifies.

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Joan Eakin and Marion Endicott presented a poster on their recently published article entitled *Knowledge Translation through Research-Based Theatre*. The paper and poster document the process by which an academic public health project evolved into a community theatre projects, called *Easy Money*. The article was published in *Healthcare Policy* (Vol. 2, No 2, 2006, pp.50-55).



Marion Endicott (at left) and Joan Eakin (at right) display their CARWH poster. The poster was prepared with the assistance of Kate Lushington, the director of the play.

Other RAACWI participants presenting at the conference included Renée-Louise Franche, Iggy Kosny, Katherine Lippel, and Ellen MacEachen. 🌱

Community Researcher Profiles

Basil Boolis **Community Lead, Legislation, Policies, Programs, Programs and Practices**

It is hard to believe that it has been more than 11 years since my injury in 1996. These years have gone by quickly, and they were full of pain, suffering, and depression. I was injured at work doing repetitive heavy lifting and excessive air-gun use while working for a large manufacturer. Since my injury, I have been in negotiations with

the WSIB, but things have not yet been resolved. I have lost my health and a lot of time going through this endless battle. At the same time, I'm trying to understand how the system works and what went wrong in my case.

Through these years, I have been involved with the injured workers' movement at Injured Workers' Consultants. I attend many meetings and I am part of many activities, including a participatory research action project coordinated by Michael Polanyi and Bonnie Kirsh. Through that experience I became interested in research and becoming involved in RAACWI. It has provided me an opportunity to share my experience, to learn about research, and to support other injured workers.

I have learned a lot from other injured workers, community leads and our academic participants. The more I learn, the more responsibility I feel towards other workers. My goal is not only to fight my claim, but to help to make the system better and fairer. I am hoping that one day I will be a valuable resource for my community, especially for new immigrant workers, so they will be educated about the workers' compensation system before they enter the workforce. 🌱

Orlando Buonastella **Community Researcher**

Orlando Buonastella has worked at Injured Workers' Consultants (IWC) for 30 years. He looks after the legal welfare of injured workers, which means everything "from the street to the tribunal." IWC's role is to represent individual workers at the appeal tribunals, as well as to organize injured workers in making joint demands and representations to the WSIB, the government and all relevant institutions. Orlando represents IWC on the executive of the Ontario Network of Injured Workers' Groups (ONIWG).

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Orlando's experience in the injured workers' movement has taken him through many changes in the compensation system, such as the move from a pension system to a wage-loss system. Such experiences are useful in understanding the legal and practical problems faced by injured workers. One of his interests is in the education of injured workers on their own history and in the original principles of the workers' compensation system. These are often forgotten in the current discourse. Orlando has worked on the Injured Workers' History Project, which is headed by Robert Story, and the Injured Workers' Speaker School, a community capacity-building initiative within RAACWI.

Orlando was inspired to join the Initiative by a participatory research project he was involved in several years ago entitled, the Workers' Participatory Research Project.

He also believes that research findings and analyses need to be popularized and made accessible to the public. He has worked on a theatre project entitled, *Easy Money*, which draws on the research of Joan Eakin on a study of small businesses and workers' interactions around early and safe return to work.

Orlando's interest in research, especially in community-based research, is also motivated by how research changes injured workers. It is a process that helps injured workers come out of isolation and alienation, builds confidence and self-esteem, and enhances support and solidarity after trauma. 🌱

Partner Profile

McMaster University

McMaster University is the principle university partner of the RAACWI Initiative. It is a strong

supporter of the Initiative, and has provided substantial in-kind and cash contributions in the form of matching funds for graduate student research assistantships, post-doctoral salary support, and academic release time for faculty involved in the initiative.

McMaster is a leading academic institution in Canada and one that fosters strong community ties. In this way, its approach is congruent with the Initiative's goal of building capacity in both the academic and injured worker communities.

Ongoing research of the Initiative, based at McMaster University, includes:

- **Policy feedback and the direction of workers' compensation policy in Ontario: Whither now?** by Alina Gildiner. This research explores how past policy changes shape the possibility for future directions.
- **Social and political history of injured workers** by Robert Storey. This research documents and analyzes the history of injured workers' struggles in Ontario from the early 1900s to the present.

As well as offering an atmosphere of higher learning to several of our researchers, McMaster University is the financial administrator of RAACWI research funds received from the Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) funding envelop of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). This funding has made it possible for academic researchers and community members to work together as equal partners. 🌱

Academic Researcher Profile

Katherine Lippel
RAACWI Researcher, Legislation
Policies, Programs & Practices Theme
Professor, Faculty of Law (Civil Law
Section), University of Ottawa



Katherine Lippel is a professor in the Faculty of Law at the University of Ottawa. She holds a Canada Research Chair in Occupational Health and Safety Law. She specializes in legal issues relating to occupational health and safety and workers' compensation and has authored several articles and books on the topic.

Her research interests include work and mental health, health effects of compensation systems, precarious employment and occupational health, interactions between law and medicine in the field of occupational health and safety, disability prevention and compensation systems, women's occupational health, and regulatory issues in occupational health and safety.

In 2005, she received a prize for academic excellence from the Canadian Association of Law Teachers, awarded each year to a Canadian law professor for excellence in teaching and research.

Recent publications include two books on workers' compensation law, and several articles on psychological harassment, therapeutic jurisprudence in the field of workers' compensation, precarious employment and occupational health and safety regulation, and gender-based analysis of compensation systems. 🌱

In Memory of a Valued Community Participant

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of **Dan Ublanski**, a valued community participant in the RAACWI initiative. He passed away on August 10, 2008. We will miss him dearly.

Dan was the Director of the Toronto Workers' Health and Safety Legal Clinic. He was one of the activists who had the foresight to see the potential of such a collaboration. He worked closely with other community members to bring together injured workers, worker representatives, and academics to explore the possibilities of developing a research alliance. Dan continued to be an active participant in the initiative, focusing on issues related to the health and well-being of injured workers. 🌱

Research Action Alliance on the Consequences of Work Injury

Contact Us

Emile Tompa
Academic Lead

etompa@consequencesofworkinjury.ca

Steve Mantis
Community Lead

smantis@consequencesofworkinjury.ca

Edith Wambayi
Initiative Coordinator

coordinator@consequencesofworkinjury.ca

Our web site

www.consequencesofworkinjury.ca