



DMRC Representative Report to the VIUFA AGM (Spring 2018)

General News

Over the past 12 months, there have been five significant “wins” in cases where Manulife was treating our members unfairly, often because Manulife was not following the process outlined in the manual they co-wrote with the employer. Although there are still some troubling cases outstanding, my hope is that this history of insisting on our members’ rights to their benefits will cause Manulife to act with more thought and care in future. Still, there seems to be a need to remain vigilant.

Members do not seem to have trouble with Manulife claims when such claims are for clear physical disabilities such as fractures, surgery, serious illness, and so on. However, Manulife is still at times reluctant or unable to properly understand less visible but equally disabling conditions such as ones brought on by mental health challenges and brain traumas.

Success in managing Manulife claims, particularly under these more challenging conditions, does seem to be more likely when the DMRC rep is able to intervene and advocate early in the process.

Relationship with HR/Administrative Turnover

The position of DMRC Rep is unusual in that the relationship of the Rep with HR is absolutely collaborative. Although it has (*very* infrequently) been necessary for the DMRC Rep to correct misconceptions and catch inadvertent errors on the part of members of the HR Benefits Team, more often the DMRC Rep benefits from their knowledge and experience for assistance. As DMRC Rep, I feel privileged to work with such a professional and compassionate group of people.

This year has seen major changes in the staffing of the Benefits Team. Ardith Conlin, whose wisdom and experience have been of inestimable value, has moved into another position. Her replacement is Jennifer Caffrey, whom I have yet to work with consistently, but who comes with experience in the area.

The addition of the Aurora system roll-out to the workload of many in the HR area, as well as the move of their entire office into the former print shop, has meant that communication between the DMRC Rep and HR has slowed down. Although this is concerning, I am confident that as Ms. Caffrey settles into her role, Aurora settles into its role, and the office itself settles into its new location, communications will be restored to former levels.

This is important because, over the past year, I have become more and more aware that much of the process outlined in the *Faculty Common Disability Plan Manual* is not being followed at our institution. While this is not critical when the cases are “cut and dried,” it can put members whose cases are complex at a disadvantage. Part of my work this summer is to comb through the manual and present the inconsistencies to the HR Benefits Team, so that we can strategize ways to ensure that our members’ needs are met without a process that is overly cumbersome.

FPSE DMRC Meetings

At our Spring Meeting in January, Ann Marie Davison was re-elected as chair of our committee at FPSE, and her experience and knowledge is of critical importance as we move forward. She has stated that she would like to see me chair the committee when she is ready to step down from that position. I am honoured by her confidence, but am in no rush, and there are no plans to enact this.

Next Fall, rather than a meeting such as we usually have, we will instead have another education/training seminar. The first of these, in Fall 2016, was very informative—but also had some issues that the committee has learned from. The training session is a joint venture with the employer and the other unions involved, and I look forward to attending, should I be re-elected into this position.

“Discovery Meetings”

One of the outcomes of the benefits contract being re-awarded to Manulife this past round was an insistence on the part of the employer, HR, and FPSE that Manulife hold a series of meetings (called “Discovery Meetings”) in order to hear some of the ongoing problems that members have had when dealing with the insurer. Most locals, including our own, have had these meetings—ours was held in July 2017. However, not much seems to be changing re: Manulife’s provision of service, apart from perhaps a reduced wait-time for call-backs and email responses for members who contact their case managers.

The problems remain a general lack of professionalism; a continued ignoring (at times claimed as “ignorance of”) the service contract and the manual; and a tendency to make decisions that are clearly counterindicated by the medical opinions submitted by our members.

In addition, communication remains somewhat inconsistent—Manulife doesn’t seem to always be clear regarding what it wants. Denied claims often come without an explanation, or without clear explanation, or with requests for information that are equally unclear. Also, on occasion

they are not produced in a timely manner, and appeals drag on, so that members can be left without income.

Wording of documents is also often a problem. There are grammatical and syntactic errors which blur meaning, but there are also typos. Even names are sometimes incorrect. The general lack of professionalism is not respectful to our members, and can at times even exacerbate symptoms such as anxiety.

There is also a continued tendency to exclude unions in any of the processes outlined in the manual.

Manulife also continues to have a tendency to dismiss mental health concerns as valid.

Any members of VIUFA who experience such problems are strongly encouraged to contact me as DMRC rep (dmr@viufa.ca).

In addition, we are still awaiting a “satisfaction survey” from Manulife. When it comes, members are urged to fill it out as honestly as possible. In the meantime, some locals (notably College of New Caledonia and College of the Rockies) have done surveys of their members seeking feedback on Manulife’s service. I am planning to ask the DMRC reps from those locals for information regarding their surveys, and am hoping to launch one of our own early in the fall.

DMRC Rep Profile

Because it is so beneficial, particularly in complex cases, to have the DMRC Rep’s involvement as early as is practical, and because often members are unaware of who the DMRC Rep is and what she/he does, I have created a profile that has been [posted to the VIUFA webpage](#).

In September, I hope to have the profile emailed out to all departmental chairs/heads and deans, since they are often the first point of contact when a member goes on leave due to illness or disability. I will also be approaching the HR Benefits Specialist, Jennifer Caffrey, to request that a link to the profile be put on their webpage as well.

Respectfully submitted,

Anna Atkinson
DMRC Rep