



*Anna Atkinson, DMRC/JDRC Representative, Spring 2022*

I would like to begin this report by acknowledging with deep gratitude the land that I live on: the traditional and unceded territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation.

I would also like to acknowledge the ongoing and deeply supportive relationship I have with Josephine McNeilly, our HR Benefits Specialist, and Dana Swarts, HR Benefits Coordinator. We work together in the best interests of all VIUFA members, and particularly given the reports I hear about the difficulties my counterparts in some other locals have with their benefits coordinators in HR. Josephine and Dana are both accessible, approachable, professional, and deeply knowledgeable in their field, and I feel very fortunate to have them as part of the Joint Disability and Rehabilitation Committee here at VIU.

The past year has been busy, as far as benefits claims are concerned. We continue to struggle a bit with communication as far as Manulife is concerned, and our current case manager, though very competent, has a communication style that does not work well with everyone. If you or someone you know is struggling with this, please let me know and I will do what I can to assist.

At VIU, we are restarting the JEIP (Joint Early Intervention Program), and have restaffed that committee. While the committee is not busy, it is important, given that it is the joint employer/union body which is contractually necessary in order for members to have access to some potentially very helpful resources through Manulife. These resources may help our members to maintain their health, rather than becoming disabled in ways that prevent them from working, with the attendant financial costs that can entail. However, we have also discovered recently that other locals are having difficulty regulating this committee's work, and Manulife's authority and role, with at least one local allowing Manulife to adjudicate a member's access to the 30-day sick (or disability) leave time. This is being grieved as it occurs at other locals, and I do not foresee it happening here. However, we continue to work to ensure that the language of the contract surrounding the issue of disability leave protects our members, and to ensure that this infringement of our rights is not allowed to begin at VIU.

This report gives me the opportunity to raise another issue which may not have appeared strongly enough on the "radar" of members: Homewood Health's security breach. In late January we were informed that this security breach had occurred in July 2021, but at the time it was thought that VIUFA members were not affected. We now know that our whole sector was affected, and that members who accessed Homewood Health's EFAP services may have had their data compromised. There was a message with instructions on how to check on this sent out in early February; if you have accessed Homewood Health, I strongly advise following the instructions in that email. If you have lost it and need a copy, please let me know and I can forward it to you.

As a group, all of the DMRC chairs gather via Zoom on February 11-12, 2022 for our spring meeting. At that meeting Ann Marie Davison (Kwantlen), who has led the committee for over ten years and was a

founding member, stepped down in her role as chair. I had the honour to be elected incoming chair in her place, and I am grateful both for the confidence the committee has in my ability, and the opportunity to serve our membership.

As chair of the FPSE DMRC, I will have a seat at the JCBA (Joint Committee on Benefits Administration), the committee which represents the Consortium which tenders for and hires our benefits carriers. Before you get too excited, I will have a voice but (in my understanding) no vote on that committee, since the employer is the one who hires and pays for these services. However, I am absolutely open to hearing from members regarding their hopes for benefits coverage in future. I will use my voice to the best of my ability, but I can't promise anything!

Also, as a part of my new role, I will be networking more extensively with the chairs of other FPSE standing committees than has happened in the past. This is an initiative of FPSE President Brent Calvert (Capilano), and will help to create connections between committees which have common concerns. One natural connection would be between the DMRC and Workplace Health and Safety, for example.

Another connection that is perhaps a bit less intuitive is with the Decolonization, Reconciliation and Indigenization Standing Committee. However, one thing that has always been somewhat of an irritant is the completely Western medical model that Manulife uses to determine both disability, and what qualifies as "adequate treatment." Western institutional medicine may not be the best, most appropriate, most effective, or indeed the most appropriate care for Indigenous members, and we are beginning to push for a broader understanding on Manulife's part. I am hoping that my position on the JCBA will also provide a forum to push for change.

There are many other links that could be made, and I am grateful for the opportunity this provides.

In addition, along with the FPSE AGM, I will be attending a meeting of the Canadian Labour Congress's "Disability Rights Working Group" in May, and will report back from that meeting as well.

Another focus of our FPSE committee moving forward will be to negotiate a Cost of Living increase for people who are on long-term disability claims, particularly those claims which have lasted for some time. Currently, calculations for LTD benefits payments are based solely on the member's pre-disability salary, and this number never changes or alters no matter how long the member is disabled. Obviously, over time the economic power of that amount of money is eroded—but the disability remains the same.

Finally, one task that the committee completed during the February 11-12 meeting was the revision of the *Best Practices* manual. This document is a superb introduction to the position of JDRC/DMRC rep, and breaks the position down to make it comprehensible. It's the document I wish I had when I began this position, and I'm glad it exists now so that I have something tangible to help the next person in my position come up to speed quickly. It is Ann Marie Davison's legacy project, and it is a wonderful example of her years of dedication and leadership on our sector-wide committee. I have a tough act to follow, but Ann Marie's mentorship over the years has, I hope, given me the skills I need.

Respectfully submitted.