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**A Case of Community Leadership:
The Ottawa Mayor's Council on
Healthier, More Productive Workplaces**

I am privileged to be here this afternoon – pinch-hitting for Mayor Robert Chiarelli of the city of Ottawa. The Mayor had to remain in Ottawa today on city business. I bring you his greetings and best wishes.

Our special thanks to Ministers Fontana and Bentley for this opportunity.

I respect your time. Therefore, I will speak from prepared remarks for 15-20 minutes and then would welcome the opportunity to answer questions or participate in your discussion of this subject.

My assignment is two-fold – first, to describe the Mayor's healthy workplace initiative and second, to paint a picture of the backdrop against which it is unfolding.

In his healthy workplace initiative, Mayor Chiarelli is giving a strong voice to this proposition:

That community leadership is the key to promoting community health. And the health of the community is defined significantly by the well-being of our labor force and the places in which they work.

In that spirit, the Mayor, last July, began a process of unifying community leaders around this subject. In doing so, he summoned the very best instincts of the people he represents. What a powerful and positive message that was. And is.

He formed an ad hoc steering committee to produce a detailed plan and from this emerged Mayor of Ottawa's Council on Healthier and More Productive Workplaces. Its official launch is imminent.

The Council has two broad purposes:

First, to build and communicate the business case for healthier and more productive work places as a community priority and standard.

Second, to marshal the smartest and best practices available to employers to vest in their workplaces those qualities which determine the success of the enterprise and the health of its people.

The composition of the Mayor's Council reflects the breadth of community interest and support – business, labor, NGO's, the Federal Workplace Wellbeing Network and the Ontario Ministry of Labour is represented on the Council at a senior level.

The Minister himself expressed his personal support to Mayor Chiarelli that is very helpful and encouraging.

The Mayor's initiative is wholly consistent with the goals and purposes of the Safe Communities Foundation which focuses on the proposition that all injuries are predictable and preventable.

In fact, the Foundation would be an excellent vehicle to spread information on the Ottawa initiative as a pilot for other cities in other provinces to build on.

In time, this initiative will strengthen the local economy, attract investment and deliver a clear message to the world at large: Ottawa is a safe, healthy and fulfilling place to work in.

The employer base in the nation's capital is a blend of high technology, public service, manufacturing, retail and tourism services, arts and culture and small business.

Each of these sectors has different experiences and needs in promoting and protecting employee health. But one theme is common and consistent. Their work force functions in stressful conditions and stressful times. We all do.

This is a common feature of the contemporary challenge shaping the disability experience of employers in Ottawa and well beyond. As a result, Mayor Chiarelli has chosen a priority for his Council on Healthier and More Productive Workplaces: the mental health of the labor force.

For this reason alone, cities and employers across Canada and around the world will be looking in on this experiment. There are compelling reasons for this kind of interest and they form the backdrop against which the Ottawa initiative unfolds.

In 1996, the Harvard School of Public Health – in its landmark Global Burden of Disease Study for the World Health Organization and World Bank – found that:

Depression was the leading source of disability in the world; disability masses in the labor force; this makes depression a business and economic issue. Our Roundtable was formed on that premise.

Disability not life expectancy now drives the world's disease burden and depression and heart disease – which, clinically, feed off each other – are emerging as the leading sources of work years lost through disability and premature death.

Great-West Life Assurance Company – a giant in the field – reports that 48% of its long-term disability insurance claims have acute psychiatric illness as the primary or secondary diagnosis.

The Roundtable has calculated that mental disorders and stress-related absences from work are costing Canada – in lost industrial production – more than \$33 Billion a year.

Several companies have localized that estimate.

One oil producer estimated that absences and downtime due to mental disorders cost that firm \$275M/yr or 11 million barrels of lost oil production annually. One steel manufacturer puts the price tag at \$60M/yr. One bank, \$30M/yr.

Mental disorders are concentrated in the labor force, among entry-level personnel and men and women in their prime working years.

Notably, anti-depressant medication is delivered by group health plans predominantly to longer-serving employees with 10 years or more continuous service with the same employer.

Mental disorders dominate as the leading single source of disability leave outside the workers compensation system.

Each year, more than a million disability insurance claims are registered in Canada with mental disorders as the driving factor. This produces, on average, 3.5 days off work per employee per day across the entire labor force of this country.

This is a stunning figure which, in turn, translates into 35 million days of lost work among full-time participants in the Canadian labor force – about half the total number of work days lost – for any reason – according to Statistics Canada.

Meanwhile, on the job downtime has a huge effect on employer costs. About three times the cost of formal absences due to sick or disability leave.

Mental health problems in the labor force have operational implications.

Energy producers – including those in the nuclear field – are turning their attention to the mental health of their labor force as an accident prevention strategy. These conditions fuel and feed off sleep deprivation and impaired powers of concentration.

Let me pause here to underline one important point. It is this.

Job stress bleeds across the workplace in many ways. It is a common trigger for a number of chronic disorders including depression and suppresses the human immune system. These conditions also interact and compound the effects of any one of them – compounding the disablement that may be involved.

Stress can also be a cause of accidents and injury as can mental disorders. Therefore, public policy and workplace practices which deal with these matters support and are aligned with occupational health and safety preventative strategies.

Another incentive, of course is cost.

Clinical studies have established links between depression and arthritis, asthma, liver problems, lung disease, heart attack and stroke. The disability associated with these conditions doubles and triples when they co-occur with depression.

Canadian CEOs are listening to these facts. We surveyed 22 of them last year and they said this:

Mental health is an issue for business whose time has come and CEO leadership is necessary to move employers to action

High rates of mental disability are a barrier to recruiting and retaining the best people.

Middle managers are the meat in the sandwich absorbing unrelenting pressures from above and below in a stressed-out, fast-paced and intensely competitive work environment.

The costs of these matters are off the radar screen of senior management and therefore go unmanaged. And probably unfunded. A concern, certainly for shareholders.

The rates and costs of mental disability in the Canadian labor force – in every province in this country – is a tough, demanding and conquerable business conundrum.

John Hunkin at CIBC says job stress is the number one problem facing Canadian business today.

The Chairmen of Torstar, Alcan, the Royal Bank, Brascan and UBS Canada all signed a board of directors guideline for mental health and safety. This is a governance issue.

The President and CEO of the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirements Savings fund (OMERS) – one of the largest pension funds and institutional investors in Canada – is a Roundtable supporter and he says this:

“Promoting mental health at work makes management sense. Pure and simple.”

The Roundtable published the first draft of a comprehensive Roadmap to Mental Disability Management in July and draft two will be released on April 13th.

This Roadmap responds to these point / counter-point realities:

On the one hand, the return to work from weeks or months of disability due to mental illness – probably depression – can be a punishing experience.

Yet on the other, study after study shows that employees returning to work from mental illness do so successfully when they receive proper treatment.

The Roundtable and the National Quality Institute have pegged 2005 the “Year for Mental Health and Excellence at Work in Canada” and will promote a comprehensive mental health strategy for the workplace right across this country.

Other developments are happening on other fronts which will place mental health in the forefront of Canadian life.

This year, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research will unveil the world’s first-ever multi-year research agenda focussed squarely on mental health in the work place.

This year, the Roundtable and CAMH will replicate in Canada a landmark Harvard Medical School study into the workplace cost-benefits of treating depression early.

This year, Senator Michael Kirby’s report on the mental health of Canadians will come out. Workplace issues will be a prominent part of that.

For the first time, in 2005, NQI has incorporated mental health issues into its annual Healthy Workplace Award.

For the first time, in 2005, Watson Wyatt Worldwide has incorporated mental health questions into its prestigious [HYPERLINK "mailto:Staying@Work" Staying@Work](mailto:Staying@Work) survey of top Canadian companies.

For the first time, a major university is working with the Roundtable to build the management of mental health and emotional issues at work into its Executive MBA program.

I can report today on one of the most vivid examples yet of the degree to which mental health in the workplace has grabbed the attention of business.

Earlier this week, the Roundtable and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce agreed to stage a “Public Forum on Mental Health, Productivity and the Economy of Ontario.”

This is a direct result of the Ontario Economic Summit staged by the Chamber and addressed by Premier McGuinty last year –

A summit, I might add, that was more than just an event. It began a process and launched a commitment by the Chamber and others to unify all sectors in common cause to do their part to grow the economy of Ontario.

This invitation-only Forum on Mental Health and Productivity will build on that and will help put the mental health of the labor force on the business and economic agenda of Ontario and Canada.

Through Mayor Chiarelli’s Ottawa initiative, the Ottawa community will be ready to draw upon all these new actions and, in some ways, that is the genius of what the Mayor is about to embark upon.

We are very pleased, of course, that Minister Bentley has endorsed Mayor Chiarelli’s effort and the Ontario Ministry of Labor is represented on the Ottawa working group at a very senior level. This is very encouraging and helpful.

Permit me to close by appealing to Ministers of Labor to put the healthy workplaces on your agenda and, in that context, lend your prestige, power and knowledge to the unfolding fight to promote and protect the mental health of our labor force.

Canadians, frankly, can be very proud of what you and your predecessors have done for physical health and safety in the workplace. Now’s the time to build on that.

For those employers who express real pride in their achievements in reducing death and injuries in the workplace, the next frontier must be – no question about it – the alleviation of

chronic job stress and the reduction of mental disability. Both relate to employee safety and injury reduction.

I say this to you: if you reach out to business on this issue, we will reach back. The Roundtable is not a voice for business, we are a voice to business and we run interference with business when that's necessary.

When you issue your communique tomorrow, may we hope you will express a consensus that healthy and more productive workplaces belongs on the agenda of labor ministers in this country and that mental health and excellence at work is a vision for Canada that you share.

Believe me, that would be music to the ears of millions of Canadians in workplaces as far as the eye can see.

Thank you.

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