

PSORIASIS IN THE WORKPLACE:

WHY IT MATTERS TO EMPLOYERS



“Psoriasis is a painful and disfiguring skin disease,” says Brenda Spinozzi, who has been concealing her raised, red patches of skin with their silvery, white buildup of dead skin cells for most of her life. “It is embarrassing, and often hidden because of the shame associated with it.”

“It can be very crippling in the workplace,” says Andrew Gosse, president of the Canadian Psoriasis Network, who is also living with psoriasis. “Especially depending on what you do – good luck being a heavy equipment operator if you have it on your feet, good luck being an administrator working all day at a desk if you have the disease and it is not controlled.”

“The myth is that it is just a cosmetic skin disease as opposed to a whole life disease,” he says. “Understand: this is a disease that crushes your soul and extinguishes the will to live for a lot of people.”

For Spinozzi, “physical discomfort or pain was a daily concern: soreness, itching, and tightness of the skin. I’d work through the pain and if it became unbearable, I would go to the washroom at my break or lunch, remove my clothes, apply cream to soothe my skin, then stay unclothed until the cream soaked in, then return to work with some relief.”

She lost a job because of her psoriasis and has been advised to choose other career paths, outside of her pharmacy technician trade. She has learned from an early age to cope, which involves planning her life around alleviating her discomfort. She says it is harder for people to cope on the job when they are diagnosed later in life.

Psoriasis is much more than skin deep. According to the Canadian Dermatology Association, “psoriasis often causes as much disability as cancer, diabetes and other major medical diseases.” Living with psoriasis may increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, diabetes, cancer, liver disease and other serious health conditions!

OVER 500,000 CANADIANS

are affected by the disease².

The lesions can make it difficult to:

- ✘ sleep,
- ✘ function physically or
- ✘ perform day-to-day activities.

While having a significant effect on those living with the disease, the economic burden to employers in Canada is also heavy.

According to recent Canadian research, the estimated mean annual cost of psoriasis is \$7,999 per person. Mean lost productivity costs account for 43 per cent of these costs, averaging \$3,442 per person³.

Research shows psoriasis significantly impairs quality of life and work productivity. One study showed that among people living with psoriasis who were also working, 49 per cent regularly missed work days due to psoriasis⁴.

Both Spinozzi and Gosse are able to manage their psoriasis with newer biologic medications. They speak passionately about the need for ongoing innovative solutions, and above all, for patients to have access to them.



¹ Canadian Dermatology Association - <http://www.dermatology.ca/skin-hair-nails/skin/psoriasis/#1/skin-hair-nails/skin/psoriasis/living-with-psoriasis/>

² Canadian Dermatology Association page 3 & 4 - <http://www.dermatology.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/cdnpsoriasisguidelines.pdf>

³ Levy et al: Economic burden of moderate to severe plaque psoriasis in Canada. International Journal of Dermatology 2012, 51, 1432–1440 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23171010>

⁴ Quality of Life and Work Productivity Impairment among Psoriasis Patients: Findings from the National Psoriasis Foundation Survey Data 2003–2011. Published online 2012 Dec 28. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0052935