OCCASIONAL TEACHERS’ BARGAINING UNIT

OSSTF DISTRICT 17

*SIMCOE COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD*

Units 6&7 - 51 King Street Barrie 705-726-1722 OTBU Web site: [www.d17otbu.ca](http://www.d17.otbu.ca) District Web site: [www.d17.osstf.ca](http://www.d17.osstf.ca)***.***

# *F A L L N E W S L E T T E R*

October 2016

**2016/2017 OTBU EXECUTIVE**

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**COMMITTEE REPRESENATATIVES**

**Kate Dewey:** (Health & Safety and Human Rights)

**Deanna Nelson:** (Status of Women)

**Jeff Parton** (Status of Women – Male Rep)

**Chris Petersen:** (Communications Officer)

**Matthew Boyd** (Communication & Political Action Committee Rep) mboyd84@hotmail.com

**Ty Walkland:** (Educational Services Officer)

***Dear Member;***

 *Well, we are now firmly entrenched in the supply game once again for the new school year, be it casual or LTO teaching. A quick overview sees casual jobs up 1% but LTOs down a whopping 26% compared to last year at this time. Various reasons for this are explained under the* ***“Jobs”*** *within.* ***Please*** *read our newsletter over thoroughly; there are some very important issues concerning you and your Occasional teaching!* ***And some relate to compensation!***

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### *ACTIVE RETIRED TEACHERS*

*ARM*

Active Retired Members (ARM) has a chapter here in Simcoe County with John Lusted as its President. They have “Wine & Cheese” get-togethers, dinners, and travel info nights. Check the District web site for contact information and event dates. Future retirees are welcome to attend these functions as well.

***ADVERTISEMENTS***

 We have had different businesses advertise in our newsletters over the years including OTIP and a few of our Executive members with sideline businesses. If anyone would like to place an ad in our newsletters in future, please contact myself and I will provide costing, content, time lines etc., we’re very reasonable.

***ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS***

Alt school’s start and end times are now standardized. Their doors open at 8:30 a.m. and end at 2:20p.m. The last period of the day (which starts at 1:05p.m.) is actually your prep period/lunch, so I would highly suggest you take in some snacks and or lunch to get you through the day. Also, we have attached last year’s Alt school info sheet on the last page showing contact persons and addresses.

***BENEFITS***

You have no doubt heard of the soon to be implemented Provincial Benefits plan for most of our OSSTF members. Unfortunately there is a major glitch in this implementation in that Bargaining Units that did not previously have negotiated benefits with their employer are not eligible at this time to benefit from the new plan. In the 1990s we had an LTO benefit plan but was lost in negotiations in 1996 because only 3 persons where signed up for it back then. We are very upset about this Executive decision at Mobile Drive (HQ). We may be able to negotiate it in at some future point and there may also be provisions to buy into the new plan. We apologize for these unheralded decisions to leave out several union bargaining groups but will continue to fight to secure benefits for you somehow, someway.

***BILL 122***

Bill 122; the two tiered system of bargaining, has been nothing short of catastrophic, as witnessed by the last round of negotiations with the Government. It no doubt has to be rejigged to work properly, but I guess only time will tell if it will be changed at all.

### *CERTIFICATION*

*(The following section is edited from the OSSTF Certification Department and is put in every newsletter because of its importance to your remuneration)*

 *All teacher members of OSSTF should have a Certification Rating Statement in their possession. This is the document that ensures you receive grid pay for LTO teaching assignments. Evaluations are done by the in-house Certification Department of OSSTF as a service for all dues-paying members, including day-to-day supply teachers. If you do not have a CRS you should go to the provincial website at* [*www.osstf.on.ca*](http://www.osstf.on.ca) *and follow the Certification “Quick Links” to the Applications page. Having a CRS in hand means that you will receive grid pay from the first day of an LTO position with no delay in remuneration.*

 *Your goal should be to get to a Group 4 placement as quickly and as inexpensively as possible. The Certification system has seen revisions in the last while and many members will find that these beneficial rule changes will allow for Group increases without any further course work. If you are not at the highest Group 4 level and have not had a re-evaluation of your existing file then you could well be missing out on the opportunity for increased salary that will come with a rating change. Send in Certification Application Form #2 and request a review of existing credentials if you believe any of the changes apply to you. If you haven’t been re-evaluated in a few years, send in the form regardless. The Certification Department of OSSTF is also happy to advise you of the steps required to progress in Group placement. Plan to complete the needed courses as soon as possible. It is well worth the effort and expense.*

 **Supplemental:** Any related grid placement documents have to be hard copies and on file at the Board office. Any AQ’s (Additional Qualifications) you have taken can obviously influence this rating. Remember the school year end date of June 30th is the drop dead date for any retroactive LTO remuneration in a given year. If you are thinking of taking an AQ course and you are unsure whether it is an approved one, fill in the forms on line @ [www.osstf.on.ca](http://www.osstf.on.ca)***.***  This process will take approximately 2 weeks but you will then know if it’s an approved course or not regarding advancement. Don’t forget that an often overlooked Contract Article refers to experiential work compensation. If you have previously worked in a related field of employ; please check articles 17:01 and 17:02 in the Collective Agreement.

***CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT***

 A lot of our time as Union Representatives is spent dealing with discipline matters related to classroom management. Please remember your professional responsibilities in this matter. Here are some helpful hints:

* Don’t leave EAs, Peer Tutors, or volunteers in charge of your classroom at any time.
* When ejecting students for whatever reason; call the office and let them know who the student is and the situation. Don’t fear extrication; if they are highly disruptive, any contract teacher would not hesitate to do the same thing.
* When moving a class from your initial assigned room/area; say to the Library or Computer room, take a second attendance and inform the teacher in charge who you are, what you’re doing there, and who you’re replacing.
* Please follow the lesson plan given by the absent teacher & do the required work. This is an ongoing complaint from our TBU compatriots. If you want to indulge them with your war stories of life experiences, that’s great; just make sure the mandated and planned work is completed first.

***COMMUNICATION & POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE***

Your OTBU Rep on this Committee is Matthew Boyd and the next scheduled meeting for CPAC is November 16. Further details of this Committee can be found on the District web, but essentially CPAC delves into many aspects of Communications & Political issues. Hugely important are elections from a Union and participation standpoint.

### *COMMUNICATIONS*

Our membership is ever-changing and we are continually improving our ways to communicate with you, our members. We now have about approximately 90% of our Bargaining Unit’s personal emails. If we’ve somehow missed you or another member’s email contact, forward it to Chris Petersen at d17otbu@gmail.com.

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###### **CONTRACT**

*Valid to August 31, 2017*

 ***Here are some pertinent items (Articles) you should know from our Contract:***

* Every casual Occasional teacher should carry the form **“Occasional Teacher Emergency Record Form**”. The maximum number of emergency duties for the school year is 4 (four) full periods and these apply to assignments that are **not** on the replacement teacher’s daily schedule. An emergency assignment of 37.5 minutes or less counts as a ½ (0.5) duty and if it is more than 37.5 minutes it counts as a full (1.0) duty. Make sure you get these duties signed off. After you have completed the 4 full period duties submit a copy to Human Resources at the Board. After that you can legally opt out of emergency duties if administration tries to assign any. Do **not** volunteer for any extra on calls as you may be inadvertently depriving another supply teacher of a potential work.
* Con-Ed teachers (Teachers’ Bargaining Unit) who are also on SCARRI and, who are in a Con-Ed assignment, must make themselves **unavailable** on SCARRI for the length of that assignment.
* Related to the above bullet; Article 12.02(c), states “A Casual Occasional Teacher who fails to identify their unavailability in SCARRI will receive a written warning. An Occasional Teacher who repeatedly fails to identify their unavailability in SCARRI will be removed from the list”. If you cannot supply for whatever reason; **make yourself unavailable on SCARRI!**
* Article 12.03(g & h) states that you must do 20 assignments in the school year split into 10 per semester; known as the Commitment rule. A half day assignment is counted as 1 commitment day. If you feel you cannot complete those needed commitment days, you may apply for a Board approved leave. You must submit a letter to HR requesting temporary removal from the supply list for up to a maximum of one year. Supporting documentation is sometimes needed to support the request, such as a chronic illness, elder care, or parental duties.
* Article 12.04(c) states: “A call-out may be stopped once the start of the assignment has begun”. This is to stop people from getting calls when it is simply too late to get to the job on time (and safely).
* Article 14.02(a) deals with inclement weather. Simply put; if buses are cancelled, your daily job is cancelled! You are expected to check an assortment of media outlets regarding bus cancellations. It is also found on the front page of the SCDSB web site. Article 16.10(a) also deals with cancellation of jobs; “if an assignment is cancelled by SCARRI with 75 minutes or less before the start time of a particular school, you will still be paid, but you will have to go to the school to receive an alternative assignment.
* Article 19.04 states “this article does not restrict the Board’s right to assign the time table of more than one teacher, providing the number of periods do not exceed three (3) periods unless one of the periods is a **scheduled** on-call period of the absent teacher. This simply means the Board can hire someone for a various periods as long as they don’t go over the maximum of 3. Calls outs normally are indicated by the terminology **“vacancy”** when SCARRI calls.
* Regulation 274 governing the hiring practices of the Board is not a negotiated or contractual item. It is strictly a government regulation/law. Changes were addressed in the Central deal where a committee made up of the Government and OSSTF met to deal with its inherent problems. We cannot change anything locally whatsoever. We are watching it very closely to make sure the Board follows the proper hiring procedures and we will grieve any deviation from the regulation’s intent. Please remember that the Board does the hiring. The only control we have in this department is to insure Reg 274 is being followed properly.
* Don’t forget about the 15-time turn down rule per semester; see the contract If you’re unsure on the details of this rule.

**Further Contract info**: With respect to our current contract, is the maintenance of that binding **legal** document and making sure that our employers are following its intent. If you know of violations in any area please let us know. In certain situations we may not even have to provide your name. A significant issue is the assigning of extra duties above the actual teacher’s timetable i.e.: on calls, hall duties, & caf duty etc. Also, part or full day reimbursement, in other words, if called in for a major portion of a particular day to be paid appropriately. Let Ben Andrews know immediately by email of any discrepancies with respect to these “contract maintenance” issues.

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Specializing in Aerial, Portrait, Sport, & Wedding Photography

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***DISTRICT EXECUTIVE COUNCIL***

 Our Bargaining Unit is one of 6 associated Bargaining Units administered by an umbrella organization known as the District Executive Council (DEC). It is an overseer of District policy, administration & finances.

### *EMAIL*

*(Board email and computer access)*

 All Occasional Teachers now have a personal Board email address (as of spring 2014). This has to be checked regularly as this is where the Board will contact you with Board related information; some of it is critical info. One can get an app known as **OWA** (Outlook Web Access). You simply put in your Board email and password and voila, those emails will go directly to your device in use. The other way to do it of course is simply to add the SCDSB email account to your email accounts. Please be very cognizant regarding the content and use of your actual emails. Any email sent through the SCDSB is subject to Orwellian type scrutiny. Keep your emails strictly professional and leave out the personal stuff. Any personal emailing between students and teachers should be avoided. The College of Teachers and our Provincial Executive have also sent out directed documents advising members to be very wary of social media.

***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE***

 I’ve included this EI info item again (found in the summer newsletter) as you will need the Reference Code of # **3511012016201612** if applying for EI at Christmas vacation.

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***FACEBOOK GROUP***

 October 20 we sent out an email asking you to join our new Facebook group page for our local Occasional Teachers. It is inviting you to join our exclusive closed group of like individuals. Please hit “like” to stay current with all of our like-minded local Occasionals Teachers.

***GRIEVANCES***

We do have some minor grievances at the time of this writing. A majority of potential grievances arise over extra assigned duties (above and beyond the teacher’s timetable) and classroom management; namely discipline or abuse (be it sexual, physical or verbal). In other words, to avoid the launching of a grievance in the first place, please maintain a well-run classroom environment and obviously watch what you say to students.

***HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE***

Incidents of aggression in the classroom should be reported to admin. The full time Teachers’ Bargaining Unit (TBU) and your OTBU Health & Safety Officers are requesting that you report any and all violent/ aggressive incidents. You must complete an Aggressive Incident Form available in the school’s main office. If you need assistance with this form, you may do either of the following: contact Tom Barnes at the District Office (705-726-1722), seek out the OSSTF TBU Branch Rep in the school you are in, or call our H&S officer Kate Dewey at 705-209-3586. It is for everyone’s safety, employer, worker, and student.

### *HUMAN RIGHTS*

District 17 OSSTF Human Rights Committee is always looking for new members and it would be great to have more Occasional Teachers join this group. HR works to promote human rights in our workplaces by increasing awareness and encouraging positive change related to human rights concerns and OSSTF Human Rights policies. Former initiatives have included a focus on socially responsible investing, reducing homophobia in schools, community resources for parents & students, and fair trade practices and products. Chairperson for Human Rights is Joe Lamoureux.

The next meeting date for Human Rights is set for Monday Nov 14th at 5pm. For more information on the Human Rights Committee and future meeting dates, visit the District website or contact our own OTBU Rep Kate Dewey at 705-361-1918 or katedewey@hotmail.com.

### *JOBS*

This semester Long Term Occasional (LTO) assignments are dramatically down due to declining enrollment. It seems casual daily work is actually up a bit in the month of September.

**Some general observations are:**

* *SCARRI has 400 members on it. Summertime attrition saw about 20 or so persons removed.*
* *Daily work may seem reduced this year but at this point it’s really the same as last year. One of the problems is there are more active teachers on SCARRI. Not additional supply teachers added to the list, but rather, more supplys wanting daily work. The main reason for this is declining enrollment and thus fewer LTOs and subsequently several redundant contract teachers now looking for sustenance.*
* *Newer and on average younger contract teachers seem not to get as ill as often.*
* *In the fall of the year, retired active teachers on SCARRI are trying to do their required 10 day/semester commitment work now before they head south.*
* *Because of the Educational climate right now SCARRI is made up of very dedicated and eager supplys willing to take on any job, virtually anywhere.*
* *Supply teachers making themselves unavailable on a daily basis for various reasons such as: appointments, sickness, nice weather, etc. has dramatically declined over the past few years. Normally on any given day we would have seen 40% of supply’s booking off for those various personal reasons. This has now dropped to as low as 15%.*
* *However, inclement weather is coming and along with it; airborne illnesses.*
* *More supply coverage is needed compared to the past because of lower APAs (Additional Professional Activities i.e.: on-calls). That is a result of strong Contract Teachers’ collective agreement language.*
* *With the Bill 115 sick day rules, teachers will no doubt be using up a considerable amount of their 11 day sick day provision allotment.*
* *One has to realize that your discipline/s have a lot to do with call outs. For example, Math and English disciplines are going to be called out more often than other subject areas, as there are simply more classes.*
* *Obviously the more schools you are signed on for dramatically increases your chances for a job offer.*

***LEGAL ASPECTS***

If you are involved in situations involving sexual harassment, over-reactive discipline, innuendo or any type of assault (including verbal) etc., you need to contact your union representatives immediately after the accusation, altercation, and/or incident. Do not say anything inculpatory to your accusers; wait until OSSTF support arrives.

***\*A WORD OF NOTE:*** Please keep your hands off students. They know their rights more than ever now and it is now an established Board Policy. Interesting also is the fact that the Board considers a backpack as part of the student’s anatomy for some reason. If you have a discipline problem, send the pupil to the office and phone down telling the office the student is on their way. I’ve usually found that most classes will cooperate and fellow students will inform you of the name of the student you ousted. If he/she refuses to cooperate at all, call the office and have them send up an Administrator for extraction. Let Admin handle it when all else fails!

***NEGOTIATIONS***

Our new contract runs out as of August 31st 2017. As you may have heard by now, OSSTF will be meeting with the Provincial Government to possibly extend our current contract and about redemption/restitution in regards to winning the court case against Bill 115.

***OSSTF MEMBERSHIP***

*CURRENCY**RULE*

OSSTF requires any supply teacher under its jurisdiction to work at least 1 day every 95 working days (read: *once a semester*) to remain a member of the Union. This will maintain any benefit associated with being a member of the OSSTF Union. If, however, an incident happens and later action is taken while you are not a member, you will still be covered because of the retroactive nature of the event.

***OTIP PARTNERSHIP***

***LOYALTY PROGRAMME***

We were approached 2 years ago by the Ontario Teachers’ Insurance Plan to support their company through what’s known as a Loyalty Programme. By us supporting OTIP, a wholly owned education insurance company, we would be helping get the word out about their services. They are owned by all the Teacher/Support Staff unions in Ontario and by us advertising for them, they will in turn provide a stipend/donation that we can use locally for members. You will see the use of their logos, banners, and ads on our communiques, web site, etc. They are highly competitive so we would, of course, highly recommend checking them out. There is a very pertinent article on page 10 regarding teaching and mental health.



***PENSIONS***

 The web site for the Teachers’ Pension Plan is [www.otpp.on.ca](http://www.otpp.on.ca) and it can supply you with valuable information on any aspect of your pension. This site can, for example, supply info with respect to what you have contributed over the years to pay out schedules using various scenarios.

***PHOTOCOPIERS***

 If you are unsure of your personal photocopier code; log in to the SCDSB web site, click on ‘Board’ then on ‘My Content’ and voila your code! Fobs will soon be the only way to use the photocopiers.

### *PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

We now have a substantive budget line available for PD funds this year. Please go to our web site @ [www.d17otbu.ca](http://www.d17otbu.ca/) to download the information and application forms. Scan them and get them back to us for approval by the PD committee.

### *REGULATION 274*

***(& Reg 148/15)***

The Regulation 274 hiring policy is now 4¼ years old and still problems exist. Most of you now understand, at least rudimentarily, how it works and, therefore, I won’t explain it in detail again. I will, however, list a few important things about it below that are still pertinent in understanding it:

* Seniority is based on the most recent hire date to an OT list, in our case; SCARRI. The number of days/years a person has worked for the Board are only used in breaking ties. A quick example of teachable/discipline seniority is you could be #233 on the overall Seniority Roster, but when it comes to your particular subject area of say, “Latin”, you might be ranked as high as # 2. The Board has indicated to me that these change almost weekly and is near to impossible to post a seniority list based on disciplines.
* The Board has put out another posting recently for the LTO hiring list closing the first week of September. 63 new persons will be interviewed for the List.
* At any time one feels there is a discrepancy in a recent hire, please contact Ben Andrews (or me) and we will investigate it with Abigail Desforges; Secondary Panel Human Resources officer at the Board. Please send us an email so we will have future access to a recorded hard copy.

***Weddings, Special Event Videos, Documentaries,***

***Editing, Titling, Film, and/or Photograph***

***CONVERSIONS TO VIDEO ETC.***

**BEN ANDREWS 705-727-2729 (cell 705-791-3639)**

### *REMUNERATION*

Our casual daily rate of pay is set at $222.20 per diem, a whopping 1% increase. To avoid any pay problems in future, write down your job number, school, and the teacher you were called in for each casual day worked. An Occasional teacher who teaches a minimum of 10 consecutive days for the same teacher becomes a Long Term Occasional (LTO) teacher and will be paid retroactively for that pay period according to your grid placement. You are paid after teaching on the 10th consecutive day inclusively and retroactively. The formula for working out your per diem rate of pay is to divide your yearly grid salary by 194 days (4% holiday pay is included). Pay particular attention to your pay stub in Payroll Portal as the Payroll Department has had problems in the past due to its sheer size.

***RETIRED TEACHERS ON SCARRI***

 As an active working retired member on SCARRI you can work 50 days without penalty to your pension. The 50-day restriction can also be fractionalized. As of now there are 65 retired teachers on SCARRI compared to 128 six years ago. Please pay attention to your number of days worked, the penalty for exceeding these limitations is a cessation of your monthly pension. This applies to all educational jobs; such as Alternative Schools, Adult Ed, Con-Ed, Contract work, and heck, even custodial. The Board has to report, by law, the number of days worked by retirees directly to the Pension Board (OTPP). You can check the number of days one has worked by checking the staff web site or going to [www.eschoolsolutions.com](http://www.eschoolsolutions.com) . OTPP has an app on their web page you can use to keep track of the number of days taught in a year. Of interest as well, is the fact that the Pension Plan pays out for an average of 35 years to pensioned teachers (that number includes spousal survivors).

3 BAY SELF-SERVE CAR WASH

 ***STAYNER, ON.***

(Through the traffic lights, west of Tim Horton’s on Hwy. # 91)

***SCARRI***

 Call-out times are: evening hours: 6pm – 10pm with mornings starting at 6am. The number of supply teachers currently on SCARRI is 406. Don’t forget about the change in SCARRI’s call in number now of 1-844-802-5279. Pay close attention to when you are called in for. An example is if you are called in for 2 periods but there is a period in-between i.e.: lunch; you should report it to Ben Andrews for pay considerations. Remember, teaching 2 periods plus any amount of a duty is a full day’s pay (or in other words anything greater than 156 minutes).

An email was sent out from the Board about a month ago regarding the fact that you can now get booked job alerts and cancellation notices by email. One can go to [scarri.eschoolsolutions.com](http://www.eschoolsolutions.com) as this site acts as a computer based version of SCARRI. Your ID number and password are the same on this site as the phone version. One can change their school locations here as well. Verification information is also in SCARRI FX. To view the status of completed casual assignments; log onto to the staff website at [www.staff.scdsb.on.ca](http://www.staff.scdsb.on.ca), **Board** on the top right then in the menu to the left of the screen, choose **SCARRI.SFX** to open the **SCARRI** page. On that page, there will be a link for View Status of my Completed Casual Assignments. A new page will open allowing occasional teachers to view past info entered into **SCARRI** and the payment status of the job. If you are having troubles getting on the Staff web site call IT at extension 11777.

Also from the Board are: **“Helpful Tips when receiving calls from SCARRI (Smart Find Express)”**

* The system needs to hear a voice or key response within 4 seconds or it will hang up. Say “Hello” to initiate interaction.
* Do not use speaker phone, it can interfere with the tones getting through clearly.
* Make sure you are using the star (\*) key and not the pound (#) to enter codes.
* Do not tap too quickly; each tone has to register separately.
* The system will pause when a phone key is pressed. If it keeps talking, it is not receiving your dial tones.
* Press the star (\*) key to have the system wait up to 2 minutes to enter log in information. This will help if family members pick up first, if you need to pull over, etc.

***SUPPLEMENTAL LIST***

 Last fall we signed off on a new Letter of Agreement with the Board. An LOU is a contract associated item that happens between rounds of Negotiations to deal with important matters of a contextual nature. We have established a **Supplemental List** to hopefully solve the problem of unfilled jobs, of which, there were 1.76% last year. We are allowing the Board to place new hires on a Secondary List. These persons will only be called out when all persons on our main SCARRI list have been offered a job for a given day. Their qualifications will not be listed and they have to be available for a considerable part of the week/month/year, as well as, being always available for Fridays. They cannot be requested and will not, **in any way,** affect the Main SCARRI list call outs.

***STATUS OF WOMEN COMMITTEE***

 There is an active Status of Women Committee here in District 17 Simcoe, but they would love to have more members at any time. This group puts on a Maternity/Paternity Workshop in the new year and will be putting on an **“Empowerment and Entrepreneurial social night”** on Monday November 28 (details on the District web site). It also fights for the rights of women throughout Simcoe County. If you are interested please contact Jeanette Parker at jeanette.parker@d17.osstf.ca.

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Status of Women Rep and OTBU Secretary Deanna Nelson seriously at work.

***WEB SITES***

Our web site is found at [www.d17otbu.ca](http://www.d17otbu.ca). We recently updated our site; please take time to check it out as it contains:

* Our Constitution
* Emergency on call form
* The current Contract
* Professional Development Application forms
* Meeting dates
* Posts/Blogs
* FAQs regarding Reg 274 and 148/15.
* Supplemental List Letter of Understanding
* Archived newsletters
* Alternative School locations

“The District Web site is [www.d17.osstf.ca](http://www.d17.osstf.ca)”***.***

***WORKING CONDITIONS***

Ben Andrews and I meet with Human Resources several times throughout the year to discuss various working condition items on your behalf. We have/had a meeting of this nature on Oct 27.

*Yours in pedagogical solidarity,*

***Jeff Parton***

*President - D 17 Simcoe OTBU (Occasional Teachers’ Bargaining Unit)*

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***NOTE:*** *You are receiving this Newsletter electronically. This is a cost saving measure, as well as, being environmentally considerate. Those wishing a hard copy can still get one. Please inform Chris Petersen, our Communications Officer, at* *d17otbu@gmail.com* *and we will send you out a hard copy via Canada Post.*

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**An article from OTIP:**

**“Mental health: The importance of early recognition and treatment”**

Mental health issues affect all workplaces, regardless of industry. Employees in diverse roles face increased demands to solve problems, interact with others, analyze data and negotiate positive outcomes. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, on any given week, more than 500,000 Canadians1 will not go to work because of mental illness. In fact, over 40% of OTIP’s long term disability (LTD) claims are attributed to mental/nervous disorders.

Over

**What is mental illness?**

Mental illness2 is an umbrella term that refers to a wide variety of health challenges that affect the way we think about ourselves, relate to others, and interact with the world around us. They affect our thoughts, feelings, abilities and behaviours. Depression and anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses.

It’s important to acknowledge that mental illness is just as real as physical illness. Like other illnesses, such as diabetes or asthma, most mental illnesses are episodic. That means people have periods when they are well and productive, as well as periods when they are unwell and overall functioning is low.

**What can I do about it?**

The good news is that mental illness is treatable. Helping our members identify mental health challenges early, through access to the right resources, such as OTIP’s Early Intervention Program and FeelingBetterNow®, and assisting them in finding the appropriate treatment can get them on the path to recovery and help prevent long term disability.

There are many different treatments available, depending on the type of mental illness a member is diagnosed with. For example, a common form of therapy to help treat depression and anxiety is called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy3 (CBT).

**What is CBT?**

CBT is a type of mental health counselling offered to our members through the Early Intervention Program. This treatment helps members understand the thoughts and feelings that influence their behaviours, and teaches them that while they cannot control every aspect of the world around them, they can take control of how they interpret and deal with aspects of their environment. One of the greatest benefits of cognitive behavioural therapy is that it helps members develop coping skills that can be useful both now and in the future.

Since CBT is a short-term treatment option that does not necessarily involve medication, members should consider it as their first option in getting treatment and can ask their family physician about it.

Helping members get the right diagnosis and treatment sooner leads to better outcomes for everyone. Employers see reduced absenteeism and replacement costs, fewer sick leave days and disability claims, and increased member retention and productivity. Members and their families suffer less, get the help they need earlier, and return to a productive and better quality of life sooner.

To support plan members on leave with mental health conditions, OTIP provides two value-added services that advocate early intervention and treatment, at no cost through their long term disability (LTD) insurance plan:

• The **Early Intervention Program** focuses on evaluating a member’s needs in the early stages of a medically related absence from work. Once their situation has been assessed, individualized assistance and support is provided as needed to help facilitate the member’s recovery and a successful return-to-work. Find out how OTIP’s Early Intervention Program can help you at **www.otip.com**

• **FeelingBetterNow®** is a web-based mental health care program that guides members and their care provider (whether it be a counsellor, psychologist, or family physician) to identify emotional and mental health issues as early as possible. Getting the right diagnosis and treatment helps members feel better sooner. To learn more about FeelingBetterNow®, go to **www.feelingbetternow.com/otip**

**Sources:**

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3What Is Cognitive Behavior Therapy? (n.d.), Kendra Cherry, Retrieved from

http://psychology.about.com/od/psychotherapy/a/cbt.htm

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*Home of the Alternative Avengers*