Stress and the Knowledge Worker

October 18, 2002 – There was a time when talk of stress in the workplace related to the experience of industrial workers on the assembly line. Managers tinkered with speeding up and slowing down the line, pushing the capacities of workers towards the breaking point in an effort to minimize per unit cost. That assembly line reality has changed with the advent of computerized robot technologies and greater discretion in the hands of the individual worker. It may not be paradise, but the issues are different.

The new global knowledge economy has introduced its own issues. Today, it's knowledge workers who experience the greatest stress, much of it a result of work overload. While the knowledge economy may enhance the potential for job satisfaction, many workers are deeply dissatisfied. In fact, a recent British survey discovered a strange correlation – rising job skills are associated with increased employee stress. Hardly a textbook prediction.

In his keynote presentation to this month's Health, Work & Wellness Conference 2002 in Lake Louise, Alberta, CPRN Research Associate, Graham Lowe, explores the causes and consequences of stress in the knowledge economy workplace and suggests what might be done to deal with it.

Arguing that "prosperity depends upon a healthy workforce", Lowe makes it clear that workplace stress among knowledge workers is not only unhealthy for the employees. It is also dysfunctional for the organization, impairing productivity, wasting talent and boosting health care costs.

The federal government's innovation strategy claims that "knowledge is the main source of competitive advantage, and it is people who embody, create, develop and apply it." Seen in this social context, high stress workplaces that hurt workers and damage creativity should be of concern to all of us.

You can access or download a PowerPoint copy of Graham Lowe's presentation, ***Is the Tide About to Turn on Workplace Stress? The Consequences of Yesterday's Truths*** by clicking here.

A commentary by Graham on the same subject appeared recently in the *Globe and Mail*. It's entitled "***Work Force Singing a New Kind of Blues***" and you can also access or download it by clicking here.

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