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HARD HATS AND HELICOPTERS: FEMALE MEDICS ON AN OIL RIG

In honour of International Women's Day on Friday, March 8, 2019, this article shines a spotlight on two female Horizon medics and Occupational Health Professionals (OHPs) working on the Transocean Barents offshore drilling rig, a non-traditional and highly safety-sensitive environment.

Horizon has partnered with the Transocean Barents to offer an onsite medical clinic. For more information about this service, and Horizon's other remote worksite medical clinic solutions, [click here](#).

Nursing is a richly rewarding profession with its share of challenges, including long hours, juggling multiple patients, and an unerring focus on prevention and healing. As nurses Roxane White and Denise James have discovered, the stakes are even higher when their charges are located on an oil rig in the North Atlantic Ocean.

Since 2017, Ms. White and Ms. James have worked as offshore medics on the Transocean Barents drilling rig, over 550 kilometres off the southeastern coast of Newfoundland. Because of its location, visitors and workers can only access the rig through a 90-minute helicopter ride, or a 16-hour vessel trip — weather permitting.

THE 24-HOUR WORK DAY

The two medics' main priority is to provide 24/7 medical care for all occupational and non-occupational illnesses and injuries incurred by the 140 workers on board. This is a high-responsibility role that comes with considerable stress. "If there's a crew member critically ill or injured, there isn't another shift coming to relieve you," Ms. White says.

The medics also manage their own Horizon OHS on-site health clinic, and are responsible for promoting health and wellness to everyone onboard the rig. To ensure safety in this challenging work environment, they also conduct drug and alcohol testing as necessary, maintain and resupply all clinic and emergency medical equipment and medications, and conduct orientation tours for new workers. They are trained to operate all of the devices and equipment necessary to provide advanced cardiac life support (ACLS) care too, which can be a life-saver in an offshore setting.

DIVERSE SKILLS AND BACKGROUNDS

Both medics began their nursing careers in traditional settings. Ms. White spent 23 years working in a St. John's hospital; in 2013, she accepted a position with various Horizon Occupational Health Solutions on-site clinics. For her part, Ms. James gained extensive institutional and specialized medical experience before becoming an OHP. Prior to joining Horizon, she worked on a drill ship and as an industrial nurse at a Newfoundland nickel plant.

Shortly after arriving offshore in 2017, Ms. James and Ms. White received the Suncor's President's Operational Excellence Award for outstanding care given to employees when injured or ill. The Award recognized their competence and professionalism in crucial periods before affected crew members arrived onshore for extended medical care.

PREPARING FOR OFFSHORE LIFE

It takes courage and thorough preparation to thrive in this isolated, harsh industrial environment. "The Basic Survival Training qualification course necessary to work out here is no joke and requires a lot of preparation to successfully complete," Ms. James points out. Ms. White adds, "I was 48 years old when

I first did my Basic Survival Training — the oldest person in the course that week! It's a very tough course: escaping upside down and underwater from a helicopter, jumping off a 20-foot ledge into the water below...I was scared, but I pushed through anyway. You can't allow fear to keep you from doing things."

Both women have also come to terms with the long shifts that are a part of rig life — and the resulting stress. "Our work days are 12.5 hour shifts, from 5:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and then we're on call for 12 hours," Ms. James notes. "There's no one to relieve you when you finish your shift. There's no relaxing, because there's always that heightened awareness that you may be called at any time. Your work day can be routine or very chaotic."

WOMEN ON A RIG: A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Fitting into this non-traditional industry has been a relatively smooth process for these professionals. "I only recently started working offshore in a male-dominated work force, and I'm mainly treated with respect for my role," Ms. White says. "I don't think my challenges are any more than anyone else's out here. You have to be a strong individual, able to stand your ground, and allow things to roll off your back," she adds.

Ms. James encourages women to consider offshore work. "There has been a big push for women in trades, with huge support from governments for equal opportunities for work on industrial work sites, and equal salaries," she says. "If you're eager for a challenge or a change in your career path, this is certainly the place to be! It's an environment that will bring out all your skills and help you develop new ones."

The two medics do have one distinct advantage: each other. "Denise and I are lucky — we knew each other from work before we came out here," Ms. White notes. "We have a strong work ethic, similar working styles, and a great sense of humour, which I feel is needed no matter where you work. We have forged very strong working relationships and friendships out here, which is vital for the work we do."

CREATING STRONG BONDS FAR FROM HOME

Both women agree that it's the people around them who make the job worthwhile. "We're needed out here; not only for medical reasons, but sometimes just as an ear, a shoulder, or a good laugh. I often joke that my office is that of nurse, dietitian, priest, comedian or even mother. They jokingly call me 'Mom' or 'Mudder' out here!" Ms. White says. "We're like a family. We live together for 21 days straight. If I broke it down, I probably spend more time with people out here than with my family."

Ultimately, although life on an offshore drilling rig can be challenging, the rewards can be equally sweet.



SELF-ESTEEM AT WORK: DOES GENDER PLAY A ROLE?

By Mary Polychronas, Psychologist, Medisys Health Group

Self-esteem plays a significant role in how men and women may view themselves in the workplace, and one's perceptions regarding his or her abilities, skills, and motivation can trigger

varied approaches on the job. But what are these differences and why do they exist? Perhaps we need to look further than job titles.

WHAT IS SELF-ESTEEM?

Morris Rosenberg, an expert in the field, describes self-esteem as "either a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the self"¹. More specifically, self-esteem refers to "a person's overall sense of his or her value or worth. It can be considered a sort of measure of how much a person values, approves or appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself."²

Self-esteem differs from self-confidence, which is rather "the trust in yourself and your ability to deal with challenges, solve problems, and engage successfully with the world"³, but they are closely linked. While self-confidence relies on external measures of success and value, self-esteem focuses on internal contributions. One can be highly confident in one area or skillset and still suffer from low self-esteem. If low self-esteem is impeding success, it may be the subconscious that is engaging in behaviours that are undermining one's achievements.

For all genders, self-esteem challenges can manifest in many ways, including:

- Feeling sensitive and easily angered or irritated
- Feeling concerned about pleasing others
- Feeling that your opinion isn't important or valued
- Doubting your decisions
- Experiencing anxiety, sadness and worthlessness
- Experiencing difficulty with relationships
- Avoiding taking risks or trying new things
- Engaging in addictive or avoidance behaviours
- Experiencing difficulty with establishing boundaries
- Holding a pessimistic outlook on life

SAME WORKFORCE, DIFFERENT LENS

While more women now work in traditionally male-dominant environments such as transportation, mining, police forces, manufacturing and construction, research shows that differences persist in the way that women and men feel about their roles. For instance, studies show that women more frequently express feeling like they don't deserve their job or merit their title. They tend to worry more about being disliked, and about not being as smart as others within their fields. Although men doubt themselves too, they are less likely to allow their doubts to interfere with their goals.⁴

DIVIDED SINCE CHILDHOOD

Findings after many years of research on the differences between how young boys and girls are nurtured prove that the developmental years greatly affect the way today's workplace

perceptions are formed. Based on boys' propensity to participate in team sports, they later tend to see the world as a hierarchy where value is placed on authority and following orders. Men typically function well in environments where rules and orders are clearly stipulated and the ultimate goal and driving force is to acquire "more".⁵

On the other hand, young girls are typically encouraged to engage in what the research refers to as "process play" or "relationship play". These activities include, for example, playing house, nurse and teacher, where there is no winner or loser and no final score.⁶ What is learned from relationship play significantly differs from that of team play — learning how to share, treat others nicely, avoid conflict, build and maintain relationships, cooperate, avoid risks and ensure everyone is happy and has a part, outweighs who will win at the end.⁷ Later in life, it remains important for the majority of women to be part of an equal playing field where everyone works together and gets along.

STRONGER TOGETHER

It's important to note that the result of men and women's different behaviours and beliefs in the workplace present a diverse set of skills to draw from in any industry. Including both men and women in senior-level discussions, decision making and problem solving processes will allow the most creative and effective approaches to emerge. All strengths and styles should be encouraged and diverse opinions embraced in order to capitalize on the gender differences that exist in most workplaces. This will help to create a healthier and stronger work environment for both men and women.

Interested in connecting with Mary Polychronas? Send an email to marypoly@yahoo.com or call **1-800-361-3493** to request more information or to book an appointment.

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Mary Polychronas is a licensed Psychologist, member of the Ordre des Psychologues du Quebec (OPQ) and the American Psychological Association (APA). She works with school-aged children, adolescents, adults, provides support to families and consults with organizations as needed.

THINGS EVERY WOMAN SHOULD DO FOR HER BRAIN

By Dr. Vivien Brown, VP Medical Affairs, Medisys Health Group

According to a Harvard Health report, the brain health benefits of physical exercise come directly from its ability to reduce insulin resistance and inflammation, and to stimulate the release of growth factors — chemicals in the brain that affect brain cell health, new blood vessel growth and even the survival of new brain cells.

Another important factor for brain health is stress management. One of the biggest issues for women today is coping with and understanding how to moderate stress levels. Stress has become a huge issue for women in particular and it can significantly affect brain health and hinder healthy aging.

While most women try to be wonderful partners, daughters, friends, colleagues, employees, bosses, sisters, mothers and all the other things they are in their lives, they need to start to look at their own health and make it a priority.

When considering steps to take to protect their brain health, women must always remember that there are non-modifiable risk factors, such as family history, genetics, gender and age. Fortunately, there are also significant modifiable risk factors.

Here are eight steps women can take now to protect and strengthen their brains:

- 1. Get restful sleep.** Aim for 8 hours a night by establishing a regular sleep schedule.
- 2. Limit alcohol consumption to 7-9 drinks per week.** Excessive long-term drinking can result in neurological damage and impaired mental processing.

3. Quit smoking. Smoking damages memory, learning and reasoning — and causes a million other harmful things!

4. Reduce levels of stress through activities like exercise and meditation. These can decrease the rate of cellular aging, and thus the risk of developing Alzheimer's and dementia.

5. Maintain a healthy diet by avoiding trans and saturated fats, getting plenty of omega-3 fatty acids and enjoying a rainbow of fruits and vegetables. Studies show that women who eat more vegetables experience less risk of cognitive decline. Folic acid, vitamin B12, vitamin D, magnesium and fish oil are believed to preserve and improve brain health as well.

6. Get regular exercise — approximately 30 minutes, 4 times per week. Recent studies show that those who work out are less likely to get Alzheimer's and dementia, and have a reduced risk of stroke. Exercise also increases brain volume in older adults and decreases the likelihood of experiencing even mild cognitive decline.

7. Keep the brain active. Continue to learn new things, practice memorization and enjoying strategy games, puzzles and riddles. The more frequent and complex the cognitive activity, the less likely women are to develop Alzheimer's.

8. Maintain an active social life. Friends and meaningful social engagements can decrease stress, slow the rate of cognitive aging, increase resilience to injury and boost overall quality of life. Social connectedness is a major key to healthy aging.

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Download our recipe booklet!





Clinician Spotlight

Meet

JESSICA SPAGNOLI

Clinic Director, Ottawa and Toronto



WHAT IS YOUR ROLE AT HORIZON OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SOLUTIONS?

I'm the Clinic Director of the Ottawa and Toronto Occupational Health clinics, where I'm responsible for ensuring smooth and efficient clinic function. I also work closely with the sales team to ensure we meet our clients' expectations.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO START WORKING IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH?

When I entered college, I knew I wanted to work in the healthcare field but I didn't have the stomach for blood, so I decided to pursue a degree in psychology. When I finished it, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do as a career, but my desire to make a difference in people's lives was strong.

I decided to join Medisys Health Group as a Receptionist at the Ottawa clinic, a role that allowed me to interact with patients directly. It didn't take long until I realized that I really enjoyed the occupational health world — and the rest is history!

WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO WHERE YOU ARE YOU IN YOUR ROLE AS CLINIC DIRECTOR?

After being a Receptionist for some time, I got promoted as a clinic coordinator where I was responsible for ensuring a smooth flow of patients throughout the clinic. After that I moved into the Clinic Supervisor role where I oversaw the day to day clinic operations. In 2014, I became the Associate Director of the Ottawa clinic. Then, in September 2018, I became the Director of the Ottawa clinic and Medisys clinic in St. John's. Finally, in May 2018, I took over the Toronto occupational health clinic.

IN 2013, YOU COMPLETED A SECOND DEGREE, IN BUSINESS. HOW DO YOU PUT TO USE BOTH OF THEM?

My psychology degree helps me not only understand and work

with clients who have had issues with employees, but also taught me how to be a strong leader. There is a science piece to psychology as well so I have a basic understanding of the human body, which can be very useful in many situations.

Once I joined Medisys Health Group, I realized that I was strongly interested in the business side of healthcare. While working full-time, I decided to lean in and pursue a business degree. It allowed me to explore a variety of areas such as human resources, marketing, business law and entrepreneurship to name a few.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY THAT YOU FIND INTERESTING?

My favourite thing about occupational health is that there is always something new to learn.

I also enjoy helping our clients achieve their corporate goals and meeting their needs. I like being able to get creative in order to successfully solve a problem with them. Over the years, I've created great relationships with our clients because I was able to assist them with an issue outside of the scope of what we have normally done for them.

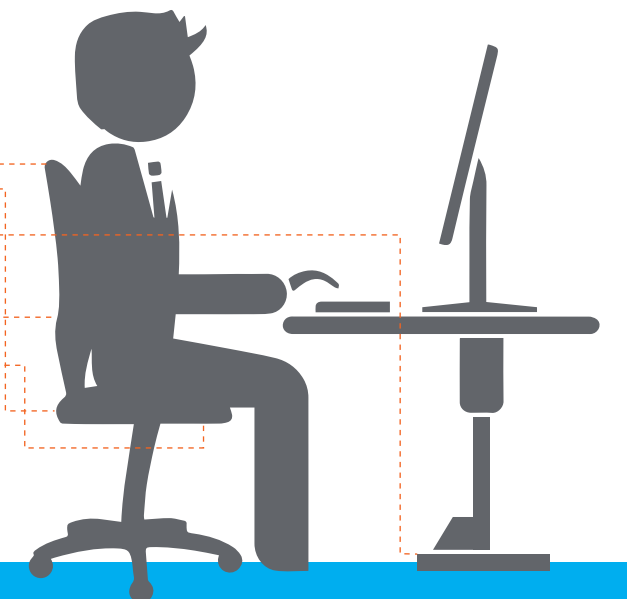
IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECE OF HEALTH ADVICE?

Get an ergonomic assessment done on your work station! I was so surprised that something as simple as changing the height of your chair and where your keyboard is placed can make such a difference for your comfort level and your posture in the long term. It can even increase your productivity!

Trust me, a quick 15-minute assessment by our ergonomic experts can literally change your everyday life at work. Contact them to find out how they can help you.

Get our pro tips to make seated workstations ergonomic!

- 1 For sitting, use a swivel chair with an adjustable seat height.
- 2 The chair seat height should be 25-35 cm below the work surface.
- 3 Use a footrest with a height of 40-50 cm.
- 4 The swivel chair allows you to move side-to-side and always face your work space. This reduces any twisting motions.
- 5 The seat of the chair must have a minimum width of 40 cm and should be approximately 1 inch thick.
- 6 Chairs should have a back support. Back rests should be contoured vertically and horizontally.
- 7 A sloped work station is favorable as it reduces the amount of bending you do at your workstation.



In The News

INDUSTRY UPDATE



WHAT'S TRENDING IN THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH INDUSTRY?



1. Building employee resiliency best tool to combat mental health issues, say experts

Self-rated reports of fair or poor mental health went from 7.1% up to 10.1% from 2016 to 2017, while thoughts about suicide almost doubled, from 2.3% to 4.1%, according to a survey from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. To read more, [click here](#).

2. Sex and gender play a role in workplace musculoskeletal disorders (MSD)

Women report pain, discomfort and other MSD symptoms in the neck and upper limbs twice as often as men do while men are more likely to experience lower-back injuries. Sex and gender differences must be taken into consideration when making adaptations to prevent work-related MSDs. To read more, [click here](#).

3. Pesticide, metal exposure tied to increased risk of heart disease

Workers exposed to pesticides are 2.2 times more likely to have conditions like heart disease, heart failure or an irregular rapid heartbeat known as atrial fibrillation, as U.S study suggests. To learn more, [click here](#).

4. Ministers discuss harmonization of health and safety standards

The new National Occupational Health and Safety Reconciliation Agreement is intended to help reduce trade barriers within Canada by reconciling occupational health and safety standards as a way to enable stakeholder organizations to work more seamlessly across borders. To read more, [click here](#).



What have you done for your mental health today?



Chronic stress can interfere with sleep, digestion, and the immune system.

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HOW IT WORKS

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Mental health exercises



Tips and inspiration



Articles and resources



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