

Taking health care to factory floor proves smart move for growing Ontario company

Roger Burford Mason

In brief

A FULLY EQUIPPED, state-of-the-art wellness centre that employs physicians and other health care providers to meet the health needs of more than 1200 employees is being credited with giving a Canadian company a leg up on the competition.

En bref

UN CENTRE DE MIEUX-ÊTRE ultramoderne entièrement équipé, où des médecins et autres soignants répondent aux besoins en soins de santé de plus de 1200 employés, donne un avantage concurrentiel certain à une entreprise canadienne.

One of Canada's top engineering manufacturing companies can also lay claim to a reputation as one of the country's most innovative firms in the field of occupational and industrial health.

Husky Injection Molding Systems Ltd., which occupies a gleaming new facility in Bolton, a small town about 40 km northwest of Toronto, produces machinery for companies that make injection-moulded parts for the automobile, pharmaceutical and packaging industries, among others.

The company uses some of Canada's most innovative employee and management structures and has been the subject of glowing reports in publications such as the *Globe and Mail's Report on Business Magazine*. It is also one of Canada's major exporters of technology and equipment.

However, one of its most unsung innovations is also one of its main strengths — a fully equipped, state-of-the-art wellness centre with both medical and nonmedical practitioners who look after the health of more than 1200 employees. It contributes to one of the best records on absenteeism and industrial injury within Canadian industry.

Husky's wellness centre is located in an impressive building on this sprawling industrial campus on Bolton's southern outskirts. The centre, finished with timber beams and posts and red quarry-tile floors, would not look out of place in Ontario's fashionable Muskoka Lakes district. It houses a day-care centre for employees' children, a fully equipped weight and training room, a library of health care books and videos, and offices for a physician, chiropractor, fitness-management specialist, massage therapist, naturopath and nurses. Between them they staff the wellness centre 5 days a week, providing medical, remedial and fitness care for the employees and, soon, for their families as well.

The team physician is Dr. Angelo Pinto, a 1988 graduate of the University of Toronto who has been practising family medicine in Bolton since 1991. He joined Husky as company physician in 1992, attracted by the opportunity to do some industrial and occupational medicine. Like all other practitioners at the centre, Pinto works under a contract that pays his bills and provides attractive office and working facilities. The Ontario Health Insurance Plan is billed for "FP-type" visits, while the company pays for other services such as pre-placement examinations of potential employees.

He is the longest serving of the health care practitioners working at Husky, but



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Dr. Angelo Pinto meets with an employee at the Husky Wellness Centre

quickly points out that “there is no hierarchy per se, and we cooperate well with each other in the routine care of patients.”

Pinto currently works at Husky 2 half-days per week, conducting pre-placement exams and doing working with staff who have work-related injuries. He also treats an occasional accident victim, although “we don’t have many of these here.” In addition, he sometimes sees children from the attached day-care centre if they fall ill. The work, he says, involves “the usual family-practitioner kinds of things.”

Pinto has privileges at the Etobicoke General Hospital and new Headwaters Health Care Centre in Orangeville, a fast-growing town approximately 20 km west of Bolton. In addition to his private practice, he has developed an interest in “medical esthetics — collagen work, chemical peels, acne care and varicose vein therapy.”

Indeed, this part of his practice has become so successful that he hopes to franchise his ideas to other family doctors through LaserMed, an independent company that will provide equipment, training and technical and marketing support.

Pinto was initially hesitant at the prospect of working at Husky with practitioners from other fields, but soon found that they could work well together to provide a fuller range of care. He works particularly closely with Ruth Anne Baron, the centre’s naturopath, dietitian and acupuncturist.

“I’d call it a collegial relationship,” he said. “We refer patients back and forth and exchange ideas about their needs quite freely.”

The sense of collegiality is fostered by team conferences during which specific patient needs are discussed and the centre’s general policies and approaches are reviewed.

“This centre isn’t unique in North America,” Pinto

noted. “A number of experts from similar facilities in Canada and the US had input into how it was designed and built and the direction it would take, but it may be one of the most effective wellness programs in the country if you look at the absenteeism rate and record of industrial injuries. They’re both among the lowest in Canada.”

The driving force behind the centre was the company’s overall philosophy, which stems from its founder, Robert Schad. Schad was born and raised in Germany and his mother was a physician who also studied and practiced as a naturopath. He developed an early interest in different wellness and health care philosophies. Twenty-five years ago he founded Husky as a small, specialist engineering company run from a small garage in downtown Toronto. “He believes people should be proactive about their health,” said Baron, and these attitudes remained the same as the company grew. “He would like each of us to take the fullest responsibility possible for our lives and he believes in that so strongly that he built this centre, equipped it and hired the staff as company employees to make it possible for other employees to take that kind of responsibility. Having the centre here, easily accessible, means more people are likely to use its services and facilities.”

The benefits to the company are largely intangible, Pinto said. “How can you tell whether production is better because of the health centre? But Husky’s Workers’ Compensation Board percentage [its injury frequency compared with other companies in its WCB rate group] is one of the lowest in the industry. I do think it is one of the things that helps the company attract and retain the best quality employees.” ?



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