



Employees and Employers Struggle to Find Balance on Chronic Disease By Ann Sullivan

As many of you know, a priority at WIPP is continuing the conversation on women's health in the workplace. Last year, we took on migraines—raising awareness of their heavy toll on women and the resources available to those suffering. This year, we found another consistently overlooked health issue affecting women in the workplace: chronic disease. This year we chose to focus on Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA).

To bring this front and center, WIPP joined with another champion of working women, Business and Professional Women's Foundation (BPW) to begin a national outreach campaign. A discriminatory disease, attacking women at a rate three times more than men, "RA", as it is known to nearly 2 million patients in the U.S., changes your life. It can mean relentless pain, difficulty moving and overwhelming fatigue—all symptoms that make a building a business or career more difficult.

Even if you don't suffer from a chronic disease like Rheumatoid Arthritis, you probably know someone who does. That's a powerful thing. And I saw just how much impact this is having on women in the workplace at our first of five national events, held just last week in Florida at the annual Enterprising Women Award Conference.

At the conference, our incredible panel (which you can watch [here](#)) included an RA sufferer, Kelly Skidmore, a VP of United Healthcare but formally a state legislator, and a doctor, Dr. Yvonne Sherrer, specializing in rheumatology, who advocates vigorously for her patients. To round out the panel, Shelli Dallacqua, owner of Shelten Media, gave an account of working with an employee to accommodate his medical needs. The panel was compelling—I didn't see a single person checking messages during the entire conversation.

As this was our first panel on the issue I learned a lot. Many of you may remember the online chat WIPP held in January on the issue, but some things don't resonate until you hear about them in person. One of the key takeaways was the importance of communication between employee and employer when dealing with chronic disease and accommodations that can be made if both parties are committed to a solution. Another big takeaway was the advocacy role a doctor, such as Dr. Sherrer on our panel, plays in assisting employees and employers understand the nature of the disease.

Our next panel will be held on April 25th in Sacramento, CA, at the California Black Chamber of Commerce African American Leadership Economic Forum meeting at 2:15 pm. With events in California, New England, Pennsylvania and Arizona, many of you can be there in person to learn about this issue, or even share your own story.

To learn more about the project visit www.wrap2013.org. At wrap2013.org you can find a video of the panel in Florida, a copy of our online chat and more information regarding rheumatoid arthritis. To learn the upcoming panels or suggest a panelist please reach out to WIPP. Let's make it our business to keep our businesses healthy and accommodating places to work—for all our employees.