

Occupational Health Nursing : A Two-fold Challenge

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Occupational health nursing is the application of nursing principles in protecting the health of workers in all occupations. It involves prevention, recognition and treatment of illness and injury. It requires special skills and knowledge in the fields of health education, counselling, environmental health and rehabilitation.

A history of American Association of occupational health nurses compiled in 1976 sums up occupational health nursing in these words: "Occupational health nursing is the easiest job in the nursing profession to do badly and one of the hardest jobs and most satisfying, to do well".

Definition

The occupational health nurse is a registered nurse who is employed to work as a nurse in an established occupational health service. She functions independently and carries the responsibility for the administration of the occupational health programmes including the planning, implementation and evaluation of the service provided for workers. The nurse is trained in the management of emergencies occupational or otherwise.

Functions

The Occupational Health Nurse curative or therapeutic function is at times to provide emergency care for workers suffering from major injuries or acute medical conditions. As a specialist, she must be able to identify health problems and give

immediate appropriate care. She must be able to recognize and identify the hazards of the establishment in which she works and potential for harm to worker's health and safety.

A Diagnostician and Guide

In the OHS set-up, the OHN is first receiver of the injured or ill-worker. The shrewd OHN besides offering the **necessary** initial treatment, applies **her mind** to relate the injury / illness to the occupational background. This is because OHN is quite well versed with the various industrial processes, hazards involved etc, and hence could always offer a provisional diagnosis to the OH physician. In OHS it is often the nurse who manages the emergency and offers a proper diagnosis and prompt action which alleviates the suffering of the worker. The nurse duty does not end with just disposing of or transferring the case to the treatment centre. She realizes that it is her duty to prevent recurrences of such accidents. She advises the industrial hygiene to look for abnormal levels of such obnoxious chemicals and requests the safety team to do the needful. If warranted she also calls the fellow workers and gives them inputs regarding the safety measures and resuscitator methods.

Apart from this she can also handle any surgical or medical emergencies independently. She is a part and parcel of the emergency medical team and always proves to be a boon to the occupational health physician.

A Part of Accident Investigation Team

The cause of industrial accidents

may be multifactor. Whatever the cause may be, the OHN who is a part of the accident investigation team, joins hands with the safety team in investigating such accidents and suggesting remedial measures, thus preventing recurrences. OHN is the first person to receive the injured person at work and first aid is the starting point in any accident analysis. OHN banks up on the right movement in giving inputs regarding personal protective devices [PPDS] because an accident victim, though in agony keeps his ear and mind wide open. Psychologically also, such advice given across the nurse's desk soaked in words of sympathy concern and consolation is very well received by the worker and followed throughout his life.

Advisor to the Safety Committee

The OHN assists in formulating opportunities to meet the health needs of the worker and participates in health and safety education programmes to make sure that the programmes are geared to the workers' needs: the OHN updates emergency policies and procedures, inspects and maintains the emergency equipment.

Role in Employee Health Check-Up Programmes

OHN plays a key role on the various screening programmes conducted in the NMC. Her duties include entering the vital data of the worker, designing and administering questionnaires, conducting interview, **doing various investigations** like TITMUS VISION testing, SPIROMETRY, and ECG recording. She partakes in certain special

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programmes like pre-employment, pre placement, pre-retirement screening programmes, PMMP, WPS, DCP, HTCP, CVRF, ANAEMIA control programme, women employee programme with specific emphasis on cancer cervix and breast and programmes designed during consultancy services.

Health Information System

She also helps in compiling the various data obtained from the health check-up analyses the data, and gives the reports to the concerned department if necessary.

Various on - plant Immunization Programmes

It is noteworthy that there was not even a single case of tetanus in our industry and the person who is solely responsible for this is none other than the OHN. Every employee when he joins BHEL is given

an injection of tetanus toxoid after explaining the complications of tetanus. Advice is given regarding the follow up.

An Ideal Health Educator

She is an effective health educator in various health related matters. It includes relaxation exercises offered for employees suffering from anxiety and minor psychological problems as per doctor's advice. First aid classes are conducted by the occupational health nurse. She is a total counsellor and participates effectively on individual and family counselling.

Coordinator in the Rehabilitation

As a member of this team, she rejuvenates the handicapped workers and prepares them psychologically to face the loss of member. By joining hands with occupational physician, she rehabilitates the employee and

helps in offering an alternative placement.

A Manager

She works to coordinate the employee care and is responsible for maintaining, updating the procedures and policies. Thus serves as a resource person in problem solving. Apart from this, she is helping in budgeting restocking, supplies, maintaining equipment and obtaining new equipment when needed.

Conclusion

An occupational health nurse has for many years faced the challenge and worked in different capacities. She has regarded her work as a commitment, and not just a job. She realises that skills and knowledge were based on experience. She maintains a delicate balance between herself, the worker and the company.

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