Occupational Health Nursing
A Modern Concept

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THE concept of application of nursing principles in conserving the health of workers in all occupations is relatively new. It involves prevention, recognition and treatment of illness and injury and requires special skills and knowledge in the fields of health education and counselling, environmental health, rehabilitation and human relations.

Occupational health nursing is a nursing speciality. It requires that the nurse be knowledgeable of potentially harmful exposure in the workplace that could create health or safety problems and to convey this information to the employees.

Eventually, the common results are cost effectiveness for employers, professional satisfaction of nursing faculty, and above all the best health care services for all concerned.

How many of us are aware of the occupational health nursing speciality and its role?

An exhibit made by Neyveli Lignite Corporation Limited on the Occupational Health Nursing speciality during October 1985 at the TNAI Conference at Hyderabad,[1] revealed that most of us are totally unaware of the role played by occupational health nurse and her contribution towards this better cause. The next immediate question that one may ask is whether it is necessary to train the nurses in occupational health? Indeed many of the nurses employed in industries practise the speciality knowingly or unknowingly. A systematic approach will defenitely increase the skill of the nurse and help her to contribute better to the speciality.

Neyveli Lignite Corporation Limited is one of the pioneering industry to organise occupational health services in our country with qualified doctors and staff. We intend spreading the message across and provide short term inplant training and distant learning course for the nurses who are interested to acquire skill, in the field of occupational health.

Role of Occupational Health Nurses[2,3]

The occupational health nurse is a professional who works independently and co-operatively as a member of an occupational health team. She adapts and applies public health principles and environmental health practices. She has to participate in activities to meet the needs of the employees and of the organisations.

She carries the responsibility for the administration of the occupational health programme including planning, implementation and evaluation of the service provided for workers with industrial medical officers, industrial hygienists, toxicologists, medical technologists, work physiologists, audiologists, medical social workers, statistical managers, records maintaining staff, computer staff and safety personnel. She often co-ordinates the medical and environmental aspects of the occupational health programme wherever her expertise is required. She also provides nursing care for workers attending out-patient department.

Her therapeutic and curative function at times calls for providing emergency care for workers suffering major injuries or acute medical conditions. She must be capable to identify the health problems and give immediate appropriate nursing care and recognise when it is necessary to refer a problem and how to involve the other members of the occupational health team, when specialised skills and understanding are required to handle the problems presented.

She must have ability to identify the hazards and its origin of establishment which are harmful to workers for their health and safety. She should investigate to see if all the people with the symptoms worked in the same department and are involved in the same process. When she sees any relationship between the work environment and the workers symptoms, she brings this to the notice of occupational physicians and other occupational health professionals with whom she works. She must be familiar with common symptoms of early industrial intoxication. Keeping alert to the new process and use of material is also essential. She must understand and appreciate the importance of production and the inter-relationships of departments in an organisation. Health education should be given to the employees for prevention of diseases and to protect their health.

Every action of the occupational health nurse influences the workers' attitudes towards the health and safety.

It is essential that the occupational health nurse understands the purpose of occupational health records system. Information recording should be correct, complete and confidential. In order to be a good occupational health nurse what is required is a sound knowledge of occupational health practice and application of nursing principles in protecting the worker's health.

The Urgent Need

As the expertise to train the nurses in occupational health is very limited in our country, recog

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nition of this speciality by Indian Nursing Council may take long time. Meanwhile the need to employ the nurses in industries is showing an increasing trend. Our country is also facing fast industrial and technological growth, inviting the attention of planners for nursing education to re-orient and re-struture the nurses training tailored to the needs of changing social structures. More nurses than ever before are becoming interested in the field of occupational health. Some are looking for an alternative to traditional in-hospital nursing. Others want to find new adventurous field. Many are very curious about what occupational health offers as a career. To give interested nurses an opportunity to learn about occupational health, as an alternative career, we are planning to offer a short one week consolidated certificate programme and also distant learning postal correspondence course on long term basis.

The programme will offer the emerging role of occupational health in the modern industrial scenario of management/labour, organisational structure, occupational hazards, occupational diseases, ergonomic, toxicology and the nurses relationship to other professionals on the occupational health team will be covered. Epidemiology, first-aid treatments, screening programme, hazard detection, control, disaster management, computer, health statistics etc. will be given equal importance[4] in the training scheme.

In general, the training will provide an opportunity for the integration of fundamental nursing theory and practice with the advanced role of the nurse as a leader, manager and vital member of occupational health care services team.

The interested candidate may contact the author for full details.

Ongoing research programme at Industrial Medical Centre, Neyveli Lignite Corporation Limited

1. Clothing design for nurses in India.
2. 'Backache'—Relation to Nursing.
3. Prevalence of communicable diseases among nurses—An occupational relation perspective.
4. Contact dermatitis among nurses due to drug handling.
5. Social problems of nurses in the community.
6. Shift—Health effects in nursing profession.
7. Dual role of nurses as working staff—and mother in the family—A cross sectional study.

References

1. *The Nursing Journal of India*—December 1985. Award and Prizes "Growth of Nursing Services in Industrial Hospital", N.L.C. Limited. PP. 326.

2. Gnanadeepam M "Perspective of Industrial Nursing"—*The Nursing Journal of India*—December 1985. PP. 307-309.

3. Aleyamma Jacob "Occupational Health Nursing in an Industrial Complex"—*The Nursing Journal of India*—December 1985. PP, 308-309.

4. Ginny Lepping, RN, COHN—'Mentorship in Occupational Health Nursing'...*OHN* November 1985. PP. 547-551.

Managing Immunization

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(a) By mouth—poliomyelitis vaccine;
(b) Interadermal—BCG vaccine;
(c) Interamuscular—DPT vaccine;
(d) Subcutaneous—TT for mother and measles vaccine.

Care and storage of vaccine

All vaccines must be:

(a) Stored at a temperature below 8°C;
(b) Protected from sunlight;
(c) Prevented from contact with antiseptic solutions such as spirit or savlon;
(d) Maintain the cold chain.

Reaction after vaccination

(1) Mild fever;
(2) Local pain and swelling at the site of injection;
(3) Mild rash one week after measles vaccine;
(4) A lump or papule appears the 3rd or 4th week after BCG vaccination;
(5) In rare cases convulsions or collapse after DPT vaccination have been observed.

Complications

(1) Abscess formation is usually due to unsterilized or inadequately sterilized syringes and needles;
(2) Contaminated vaccine can lead to severe reactions.

Health education

Educate the workers thoroughly regarding immunization programme.

Educate the people about the programme, importance and mild reactions so that they will come forward for completion of the immunization for all the children.

Mass media propaganda.