

Occupational Health Nursing

An Introduction

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Occupational Health Nursing (OHN) is a developing and modernising discipline in the field of Nursing. The branches of Nursing specialities are many like Paediatric, Operation Theatre Techniques, Maternity, Public Health, Coronary Care, Blood Bank, Anaesthesia, etc. The Occupational Health Nursing has yet to develop in our country. Hundreds of nurses are working in very many industries in our country. These nurses are taking care of millions of workers in the factories.

Occupational Health Services

The Medical Services inside the work place, industry, plant are called occupational health services. The OHS has a team consisting of trained personnel in Occupational Medicine, Nursing, Hygiene Toxicology, Biochemistry, Health Education, Psychology, Social Work, Epidemiology, Documentation, Dentistry, Dermatology, Ergo-ophthalmology, Ergonomics, X-Ray and Physiotherapy, etc.

The main objects of OHS are

- (1) To promote the physical, mental and social well-being of the workers.
- (2) To assist in providing safe and healthy working conditions by scientific investigation and control of industrial environment.
- (3) To provide emergency treatment for sick and injured while at work.
- (4) To prevent occupational diseases and injuries.
- (5) Medical monitoring of the workers. Pre-employment, periodical and pre-retirement medical examination.
- (6) To determine factors and hazards as risk to workers' health and safety.
- (7) To provide facilities for rehabilitation of workers disabled temporarily or permanently by diseases or injury.
- (8) To educate all concerned in the attainment and preservation of health in industry or work place.
- (9) To advise and collaborate with management and the workers and participate in implementing measures for the improvement of OHS.
- (10) To collect and provide information, education and counselling.

Nature of the Job

It has been said: "Occupational health nursing is the easiest job in the world to do badly and the most demanding to do well". The Nurses are the backbone

in the occupational health services.

The conventional nurses who are in the hospitals and clinics always look after the sick. Unlike the bedside care and other Nursing care to the sick, the occupational health nurse looks after healthy workers, whose health may be endangered by adverse factors in the work place. This involves application of Nursing principles and public health for the purposes of conserving, promoting and restoring health of individuals and groups in their place of employment. This specialised training is devoted to health promotion at work place based on prevention of injuries and illness.

Nurses in developed countries largely look after occupational health and safety functions almost independently as doctors there (in UK & USA) are mostly part-time consultants so also are occupational hygienists. As such, nurses are fully responsible for health monitoring of the workers and work places. Therefore, the full-time occupational health nurses take care of pre-employment, periodic health checks, environmental monitoring. They decide when to get help from the doctor or hygienist depending on the need. In a comprehensive OHS programme where doctors, hygienists and other staff are available nurses have still a great role. Specialised training in OHN enables these nurses to be familiar with the raw materials, processes, by-products and products of the industry in which she is employed and also the hazards in the work place. OHN is a professional member of the multidisciplinary team of OHS.

The specially trained Occupational Health Nurse (OHN) has the capability:

1. to provide emergency treatment for the workers in her work place in case of illness and injuries;
2. to carry out special health care programmes to the workers;
3. to establish a meaningful relationship between the workers.

The fact is that the OHN provides Nursing care for workers who are not patients but workers who often do not see any need or reason for Nursing care make the OHN's role different from that of the nurse in the hospital setting. The ability of OHN to detect the possible relationship between the physical and mental ill-health of workers and the stresses of their job are essential characteristics of the OHN specialist. Every action of OHN and everything said or not said influence the workers' attitude towards health.

The major functions of Occupational Health Nursing Unit in Occupational Health Services are:

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1. Organising a OHN unit in OHS to suit the organisational requirements.
2. Treating cases in emergencies like illness and injury.
3. Organising OHS health care programmes.
4. Administering screening tests like vision testing, lung function tests, audionatry, ECG and other physical fitness tests.
5. Administration of suitable tests for pre-employment, pre-placement, periodic checks, voluntary and pre-retirement health checks.
6. Protecting the works against any health hazard which may arise out of their work.
7. Contributing to the establishment and maintaining of the highest possible degree of physical and mental well being of workers.
8. Control/check on chronic cardiac diseases and also on high risk area workers.
9. Placing, monitoring and arranging training for handicapped workers.
10. Health check and surveillance including health education and special programmes for women, and also the care of pregnant women.
11. Health supervision of working environment by periodical visits and inspectional surveys.
12. Health monitoring of food establishment/canteen, drinking water, rest room and hygiene of those areas.
13. Job analysis and allocation of jobs to workers in the light of hygienic, physiological and psychological considerations.
14. Health education on family welfare, communicable disease, disease control, work hazards, accident prevention, training in First Aid, immunisation, etc.
15. Association with employee assistance programmes.
16. Maintaining records of individual workers and other necessary institutional records.
17. Accident prevention and investigations.
18. Notification of reportable illness and accidents.
19. Community education, educating the residents around the industry about the hazards and protection.
20. Ergonomics and work posture of the workers.
21. Preparedness for disaster management.
22. Co-ordination with the local medical, ambulance unit for day-to-day functions.
23. Home visits of workers whenever the need arises.
24. Dietary education of wives and people at home of workers who are suffering from diseases which need directions on dietics.

25. Preventive action on epidemic diseases and seasonal diseases.

Conclusion

Life itself is an occupation. Occupations men pursue can range from business to laziness and none of them is devoid of risk. The OHS is an endeavour to bring about a psycho-physical balance between man in his environment and his occupation. Being an integral part, Occupational Health Nursing naturally partakes the mightiness, dignity and multi-disciplinary quality of the OHS endeavour.

For such a demanding discipline of nursing not much care is taken. There is no Nursing College or institutions in India giving training. The demand for trained nurses in Occupational Health Nursing is increasing day by day. So this is appropriate time that all nurses and Trained Nurses' Association of India take steps to apprise the government of the necessary steps. This is fast emerging as a full fledged discipline of immediate importance and relevance to the technological era in which we are living today.

Academic programmes in such service areas must be coupled with demonstration training and practical field work. This will go a long way for health care promotion activities of our work force in India.

FAITH AND HOPE OF NURSES

Fantastic is the idea of a healthier world,
Always struggling to make it a reality,
It is a dream nurtured by nurses everywhere,
Thinking of promoting a brighter tomorrow for all,
Hope is the pill they swallow every day.

Always in the service of the sick and suffering,
No matter how much she has to sacrifice herself,
Deriving pleasure from her humble contributions.

Hope, the pill of hope, provides them a euphoric feeling,
Often they believe that their dreams will come true,
Patience is the special garment they wear,
Eternal is their waiting without despair.

Often nurses meet with pressures that are mounting,
Fighting for their rightful place in health team
as well as society.

Nurses are a great health infantry of its own,
Under the roof of hospital or out in the community,
Rarely a place you find where they are not needed,
Such is their place in the health care set up in India,
Enlightened public alone is aware of their contributions,
Sure they have problems, but they shall march ahead.

Mrs. S.A. Samuel