

The Changing Role of the Industrial Nurse

By P. V. Lloyd*

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSES contribute in a positive way to the maintenance of workers' health and the prevention of accident and disease at the place of work. They achieve these aims by working with doctors, safety officers, hygienists, engineers and ergonomists in the concept of the multi-disciplinary team.

There are no legal requirements in Britain for first aid posts or ambulance rooms to be manned by qualified nurses. Where medical centres are provided by the employer and staffed by qualified nurses exemption from legal requirement to provide first aid boxes may be gained.

Advisory Service

The State's provisions for occupational health services include the Employment Medical Advisory Service, which is administered by the Department of Employment, a Government department, under a Chief Employment Medical Adviser.

Up to 12 occupational health nurses have been recruited by this service, each attached to Regional offices.

Their duties, which are in a state of development, include giving advice to employers and unions on health problems at work, assisting with the health examination of young persons, liaison with the school health service and local careers officer of the Department of Employment, assisting with environmental surveys, and health screening and monitoring.

They work in close liaison with employment medical advisers within the service and with nurses employed in private industry.

The main body of safety and health legislation in Britain is currently being reviewed with the intention of unifying inspectorate functions and simplifying the law which, as it stands, is complex.

Development of Nurses

Many occupational health nurses work in nationalised industries, the civil service, coal mines, steel industries, docks, military establishments, Government departments, the Post Office, and in the National Health Service (the state system which covers almost the entire population), where up to fifty nurses are now engaged in occupational health nursing in hospitals. This is a rapidly developing service.

The private industries make

their own contribution to the health of the worker by providing occupational health services staffed by doctors and nurses.

The occupational health nurse plays an important role in these industries, including engineering, chemical, oil, paper printing, food and telecommunications as well as the service and transport industries. The Department of Employment estimate that about 90% of factories employing more than 500 workers have some nursing or medical cover.

The provision of an occupational health service to the small factory is often necessary. Group industrial health services have been developed and controlled by a trained occupational health doctor, with teams of occupational health nurses providing a visiting service to the small industries (usually under 500 workers).

It is estimated that there are about 8,000 nurses working in factories, but accurate statistical information is not at present available to show how many nurses are working in each category. (Contd.)



An Industrial Nurse inspects the hands of canteen staff to ensure they meet the requirements of hygiene.

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Training Schemes

The first known nurse to be made responsible for the health of workers in Great Britain was Philippa Flowerday in 1872. She was a district nurse employed by the family business of Colman's Mustard. In 1934 the Industrial Welfare Society in conjunction with the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) started the first course in occupational health nursing.

Specialised training in occupational health nursing is provided by the Royal College of Nursing and the National Council of Nurses of the United Kingdom. Already nearly 2,000 occupational health nursing certificates have been issued. Courses are offered on both full time and day release basis. The full time course lasts for six months and may be taken at the RCN Institute of Advanced Nursing Education, London, or at the Department of Social and Occupational Medicine, University of Dundee, Scotland.

Day release courses lasting for eighteen months are provided at colleges of technology and other centres of higher education throughout the country.

The RCN approves the syllabus and a uniformly high standard of training is achieved.

Students may apply for government grants to undertake the full time course and, through the generosity of private firms, a few scholarships are available.

The syllabus, which is regularly revised, consists of occupational health, occupational health nursing, and the modern industrial system and social services. Candidates also have to submit a special study in a subject of their own choice.

Professional Organisation

The RCN is the largest professional organisation for nurses in the United Kingdom, with a membership exceeding 100,000. The interests of the occupational health nurse are served by a Nurse Officer specialising in occupational health nursing and an elected committee of nurses which decides policy and promotes the interests of occupational health nursing with

the approval of the RCN Council.

Regular professional conferences are organised at national and regional level and throughout the country occupational health nursing groups are officially established to provide a local forum for discussion, education and involvement in the policy making processes.

Such activity combats professional isolation and provides nurses, especially those working alone, with professional support.

All nurses in the RCN also have indemnity insurance protection, which is reassuring to those who have to make decisions often without medical support.

In addition to serving the needs of members, the occupational health section maintains close liaison with the occupational health

doctors through the Society of Occupational Medicine, and is well represented at international level on the Permanent Commission and International Association on Occupational Health.

Pay, Conditions

The RCN engages in labour relation activities, and in Britain this is especially important for occupational health nurses, since they are not covered by the National Whitley Council agreements which apply to all nurses working within the National Health Service.

The RCN produces a recommended scale of salaries and a structure for the guidance of both employers and nurses. The existing structure recommends grades
(Contd on p. 84)



Philippa Flowerday (extreme right) appointed by Colmans, the Mustard people, as the first Industrial Nurse in 1872.