

The Role of the Occupational Health Nurse in Workplace Health Management



WHO Regional Office for Europe

ABSTRACT

This document describes the role of the occupational health nurse in Europe, and whilst recognizing the wide variation that exists in occupational health nursing practice between different countries this document reflects the standards that have already been achieved in those countries where occupational health nursing is at its most advanced.

Within the WHO European Member States the discipline of occupational health is undergoing rapid development. This is largely due to the new demands and expectations from employers, employees and their representative bodies as they recognize the economic, social and health benefits achieved by providing these services at the workplace. The rapid development of occupational health services has also, in part, been driven by the expanding program of EU legislation in the areas of health, safety and environmental protection and the need by employers to respond to this legislation.

In addition occupational health services, provided at the workplace to address the health care needs of working populations have been identified as an important component of the public health strategy. These services can also make a significant contribution to other government initiatives, such as; reducing health inequalities, reducing social exclusion and sickness absence, and by protecting and promoting the health of the working population occupational health services can help to reduce the overall burden of ill health in Europe.

Occupational health nurses, as the largest single group of health care professionals involved in delivering health care at the workplace, have responded to these new challenges. They have raised the standards of their professional education and training, modernized and expanded their role at the workplace, and in many situations have emerged as the central key figure involved in delivering high quality occupational health services to the working populations of Europe. Occupational health nurses, working independently or as part of a larger multiprofessional team, are at the frontline in helping to protect and promote the health of working populations.

Keywords

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Target audience for this document includes:

- Policy-makers in the Ministries of Health, Education, Labour, Employment, and Environment as well as workplace health practitioners in Public Health, Health and Safety, and Economic Development institutions within WHO European Member States.
- Employers and employees and their representative bodies.
- The document will also be of interest to purchasers and providers of occupational health services, occupational health nurses, educators and other specialists in the field of occupational health

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Foreword.....	i
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Changing nature of working life and the new challenges.....	1
1.2. The need for improved workplace health management.....	2
1.3. The role of the World Health Organization and International Labour Organisation	4
1.4. The London Declaration - a new political commitment	6
2. Workplace Health Management	7
2.1. The Healthy Workplace setting - a cornerstone of the Community Action Plan	9
2.2. The Healthy Community setting.....	11
3. New Workplace Health Policies	12
3.1. Key steps in developing workplace health policies	12
3.2. Key steps in implementing workplace health policies	14
4. Key benefits of workplace health management.....	15
5. The development of multiprofessional occupational health services	20
5.1. The occupational health team.....	23
5.2. Nursing staff.....	24
6. Role of the Occupational Health Nurse in Workplace Health Management.....	26
6.1. The occupational health nurse as a unique ‘frontliner’	27
6.2. Variation in roles of occupational health nurses within member states	28
7. Core areas of knowledge and competence.....	29
7.1. Clinician.....	29
7.2. Specialist.....	32
7.3. Manager.....	38

7.4. Co-ordinator	41
7.5. Adviser.....	42
7.6. Health educator.....	42
7.7. Counsellor	43
7.8. Researcher.....	44
8. Guidance on determining the function of an occupational health nurse	45
9. Evaluation of Performance.....	47
10. Education and training of occupational health nurse	49
Annex I Professional associations active in occupational health nursing	51
Annex II Federation of Occupational Health Nurses within the European Union.....	52
Annex III List of occupational health nursing associations affiliated to the Federation of Occupational Health Nurses in the European Union.....	56
References.....	59
Bibliography	64

Foreword

The occupational health services, provided by employers or governmental authorities in all countries of the WHO European Region to address the health promotion, health protection and health care needs of working populations have been identified as an important component of the public health system. These services can make a significant contribution to essential governmental initiatives, such as; increasing health equality, improving social cohesion, and reducing sickness absence. They help to reduce the overall burden of diseases in Europe. The rapid development of workplace health protective and preventive services has been driven by the WHO strategies and recommendations, the conventions of ILO as well as by the European Union legislation in the areas of health and safety at work and by the European Commission programme in public health. This was also largely due to the new demands and expectations from employers, employees and their representative bodies as they recognize the economic, social and health benefits achieved by providing these services at the workplace. These services provide the available knowledge and evidence necessary for the continuous improvement of workplace health management, but they also participate in this process.

Comprehensive workplace health management is a process involving all stakeholders inside and outside the enterprise. It aims at empowering them to take control over their own health and their family's health considering environmental, lifestyle, occupational and social health determinants and quality of health care. It is based on health promotion principles and it creates a great challenge to health, environment and safety professionals providing services, advice, information and education to social partners at work. It involves also taking care of considerable socioeconomic interest of all involved stakeholders. It has been shown in several instances that the enterprises acting on the well-regulated market can gain competitive advantage by:

- Protecting human health against health and safety hazards occurring in the work environment

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