



## Editorial

# Occupational Health Nursing: A New Panorama to Indian Nursing

**Tirthankar Ghosh**

Consultant Editor; IJNRP

Occupational health nursing is a specialty nursing practice that provides for and delivers health and safety programs and services to workers, worker populations, and community groups. The practice focuses on promotion, maintenance and restoration of health, prevention of illness and injury, and protection from work-related and environmental hazards.<sup>1</sup>

Occupational health nurses, as the largest 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 has emerged as the central key figure involved in delivering high quality occupational health services to the working populations. Occupational health nurses, working independently or as part of a larger multi professional team, are at the frontline in helping to protect and promote the health of working populations. Occupational health nurses can also make a major contribution to the sustainable development, improved competitiveness, job security and increased profitability in enterprises and communities by addressing those factors which are related to the health of the working population. By helping to reduce ill health occupational health nurses can contribute to the increased profitability and performance of organizations and reduce health care costs.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to occupational health and workplace health promotion there is also another important aspect to Workplace Health Management. It is related to the impact that each enterprise may have on the surrounding ambient environment, and through pollutants or products or services provided to others, its impact on distant environments. Although the environmental health impact of enterprises is controlled by different legislation to that which applies to health and safety at work<sup>3</sup>, there is a strong relationship between safeguarding the working environment, improving work organization and working culture within the enterprise, and its approach to environmental health

management. Many leading enterprises already combine occupational health and safety with environmental health management to optimally use the available human resources within the enterprise and to avoid duplication of effort. Occupational health nurses can make a contribution towards environmental health management, particularly in those enterprises that do not employ environmental health specialists.

In India also to respond to the rising burden of occupational diseases, we would require appropriate occupational health services, which should be delivered through a multi professional occupational health team. The occupational health team mainly comprises of occupational health physician, safety officer, industrial hygienist, and occupational health nurse (OHN). Occupational health nursing involves the application of nursing principles in conserving the health of workers in occupational settings. It involves prevention, recognition, and treatment of illness and injury and requires special skills and knowledge in the fields of health education and counseling, environmental health, and rehabilitation.<sup>4</sup> However, it is generally acknowledged that in most developing countries the human resources engaged in occupational health services are deficient or at a very early stage of development. Presently, in India no statistics are available on the existing and required OHNs to address the challenges surrounding rising burden of occupational diseases and for provision of occupational health care services.<sup>5</sup>

Now with a growing realization among enterprises that they can gain competitive advantage by protecting and promoting human health, the workplace medical units have changed their working and work priorities to support the business. Thus the nurses at workplaces have to change their roles accordingly to effectively support the Occupational Health Physician. Now, OHNs have moved into disease management, safety audits, and environmental protection and hearing conservation initiatives besides being first-aid trainers. They are now not only the care

givers, but get increasingly involved in referral, follow-up, return to work assessments, and rehabilitation.

OHNs are the largest group of health care professionals involved in workplace health management in Europe and in India we have a great demand of OHNs by the industrial workforce. It can be presume that, OHN is the key to creating healthy and productive workplace and one of the drivers in providing high standard of patient care along with improving health, safety and productivity to work force of India.

## Reference

---

1. WHO. Role of the occupational health nurse in the workplace [Internet]. 2004 [Cited on 2014 Dec 23]. Available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupational\\_health\\_nursing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupational_health_nursing)
2. Occupational Health Nursing [Internet] 2014. [Updated 2014 June 4; Cited on 2014 Dec 20]. Available on [http://www.who.int/occupational\\_health/publications/eurnursing/en/](http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/eurnursing/en/)
3. Environment 2010: Our Future, Our Choice. The Sixth Environmental Action Programme of the European Community 2001-2010. European Commission. [Internet]. [Cited 2014 Dec 15]. Available on <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/newprg/index.htm>
4. Tiwari RR, Khandare SM. Occupational Health Nurse-an overview. *Nurs J India* 2001; 92:180-1.
5. Tiwari RR, Sharma A, Zodpey SP, Khandare SM. Does occupational health nursing exist in India? *Indian J Occup Environ Med* 2014;18:113-7