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Occupational Health Nursing – What is it?

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Background

Occupational Health and Safety – “the effects of work on health and health on work” is the oldest health care specialty, originating with Hippocrates who instructed his students “to ask their patients what they do for a living”. Since the early twentieth century it has been defined as “The specialty devoted to the prevention and management of occupational injury, illness, disability, and the promotion of health and productivity”.

Occupational Health Nurses (OHNs) are not “Band-Aid Nurses”. They are an integral part of any successful occupational health and safety program by keeping workers well, assisting them to achieve an optimal level of health, while treating workplace illness and injury and managing timely and safe return to work. The need for OHNs has become even more critical given the ever-increasing rate of poor mental health in today’s society. Poor mental health is well recognized as being a major workplace health issue and OHNs with their training and expertise are uniquely positioned to assist workers and management to address this issue.

Everything the OHN does falls within the Four Pillars of Occupational Health Nursing:

1. Disability Management
2. Workplace Health Promotions and Wellness
3. Health and Safety Promotion Management
4. Business Strategies for Legislative Compliance in the Workplace

Management of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), wellness initiatives, employee education, immunization clinics, one-on-one consultations on health-related issues, ergonomic assessments, pro-active Disability Management are all part of the responsibilities of the OHN.

Occupational health and safety is impacted by the rules which govern the Ministries of Health, Labour and Environment. Increasingly, OHNs take on the key responsibility to monitor the health effects of the workplace environment both inside and outside the building, acquiring expertise in Environmental Health & Safety (“the branch of medical science devoted to the prevention and management of adverse health outcomes from exposure to chemical or physical agents in the workplace, and their effect on the environment”).

To remain competitive, workplaces must reduce costs with a common purpose: a healthy workplace and workforce, productivity, profitability. OHNs contribute significantly to a company’s healthy bottom line. They have the expertise to identify problems and propose

OOHNA Offers

- ✓ **In-class presentations or webinars on OH Nursing.**
- ✓ **Free student memberships.**
- ✓ **4th Year Student Placements and more.**

Interested? Please contact OOHNA at 416•239•6462 or administration@oohna.on.ca

solutions within budget constraints. They can create the supportive environment for behavioural changes and can assist management to develop models that adapt to the company's needs.

OHNs assess hazards, provide early intervention for risk management and are the employer/employee advocates, eliminating unnecessary stress and providing clear policy direction.

Opportunities for Nursing Students

Changes to various legislations and the increase rise of mental health issues is creating a need for more OHNs, a need which is difficult to fill given the increasing numbers of OHNs nearing retirement. New graduates are also not exploring these opportunities as occupational health nursing is not part of the core nursing curriculum. Most nursing programs include occupational health under the generic heading of "Community Nursing" which limits a full appreciation of this rewarding nursing field.

When the speciality of occupational health is discussed with nursing students at nursing career fairs or nursing student conference trade shows, students are interested to learn that occupational health nursing promotes independent thinking, provides challenging opportunities, and means working with a healthy population, with little or no shift work or heavy lifting. They are interested in the opportunity to be part of a management team, using their many transferable skills and being valued for decision-making outcomes that benefit the workplace bottom line positively.

The Ontario Occupational Health Nurses Association

The Ontario Occupational Health Nurses Association (OOHNA), incorporated in 1971, was formed to serve the specific needs of Nurse Practitioners, Registered Nurses and Registered Practical Nurses working in the occupational health and safety field. A recent member survey indicated that education, mentorship, and insurance were the top three reasons for joining OOHNA.

OOHNA played a key role in helping to develop the first certification program that is today managed by the Canadian Nurses Association and OHNs are one of the most highly certified Canadian nursing specialities – proof of their on-going commitment to continuous learning.

OOHNA is a key stakeholder in helping to change the landscape of health and safety in Ontario by partnering with the Canadian Standards Association, Ontario Ministry of Labour, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Health, and Workplace Safety and Insurance Board on initiatives that affect the workplace.

Looking for a speaker to provide more details in the field of occupational health nursing?

OOHNA members are available to give presentations in-class or long-distance or at your information nights and conferences. We are currently updating our *Occupational Health Nursing Career Guide* which will be sent to all college and university nursing schools to post on their website by January 2019.

Need a Student Placement with Mentorship? OOHNA supports student nurses with our own placement program which places 4th year Nursing students interested in learning about OH & S with experienced OHNs. See the sidebar for the types of projects in which you can participate.

Contact the OOHNA office to discuss this opportunity further.

OOHNA also offers free membership to all Ontario Nursing Students. To sign up for free membership, please contact the OOHNA office: administration@oohna.on.ca or call 416-239-6462 (1-866-664-6276). Click on this link to read the **Student Information Brochure**.

Free Continuing Education for Nursing Students

3rd and 4th year nursing students are also welcome to attend the first day of OOHNA's annual two-day conference for **free**. Please note this does not include transportation to the conference or accommodation.

As well, a maximum of four 4th year nursing students (on a first-come, first-ser basis) may attend OOHNA's course, *The Essentials of Occupational Health, Safety and Disability Management*. This course is taught by experienced occupational health and safety specialists and provides an excellent introduction to the specialty. Students will receive a valuable course handbook and graduates of the program will receive a certificate in health, safety and disability management. The course is taught in Mississauga and students are responsible for their own transportation and if required, accommodation. The course is held two to three times a year on seven consecutive Saturdays. Interested students should check the OOHNA website regularly <http://oohna.on.ca/education-and-events/courses/>

Occupational Health Nursing gives you the option of a career outside the hospital. It is a unique opportunity and with growing environmental concerns, an aging workforce to be accommodated, mental health (stress) as a key workplace illness, medical marijuana, and companies needing to survive by fiscal restraint, the need for OHNs can only increase.

For information please contact Executive Director Drew Sousa, RN, COHN(C) at administration@oohna.on.ca

CALL OUT BOX FOR ARTICLE – PLEASE POSITION NEAR Student Placement section

Example Projects Completed by Student Nurses in Placements

- Awareness and education re: Febrile Assessment Form
- Back Injury prevention program (“Safe Moves”)
- Development of a health and wellness newsletter for employees
- Education re: inhalation of diesel fumes
- Education: re: smoke free policy
- Fume hood use policy
- GSPS access to health information
- Hazards of Working in the Sun
- Implementation of case management meetings
- Implementation of workplace wellness program
- Infection control: hand hygiene education sessions
- Influenza immunization campaign
- Information re: outdoor protection
- Lifting policy
- LU Occupational Health-Awareness and education Re: First Aid Kits
- LUFA-ergonomics
- MASHA-exercise program, healthy eating implementation
- Medication labelling system
- N95 mask implementation
- Needlestick Injury Prevention
- Policy re: pre-employment health reviews
- PSW's and teamwork
- Red Cross-Managing Volunteer Stress
- Role assessment and workload implications
- SDHU update to workplace wellness resources
- Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) and Osteoporosis – development of information pamphlets