



POSITION STATEMENT

Case Management: The Occupational and Environmental Health Nurse Role

INTRODUCTION

Case management is a process of coordinating comprehensive health care services, following illness or injury, to achieve optimum quality care delivered in a cost effective manner. The process integrates assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation components. Occupational and environmental health nurses (OHNs) as case managers provide all or a portion of these services in addition to coordination of healthcare delivery to workers. (American Association of Occupational Health Nurses [AAOHN], Case Management Society of America [CMSA], and Mullahy & Jensen).

Based on the complexities of health care and business environments, case management services must be delivered by qualified health care professionals with sufficient knowledge and expertise to perform this function competently (CMSA).

OHNs are the ideal professionals to coordinate workers' health care services from the onset of illness or injury to safe return-to-work or an optimal alternative. To assist workers to achieve optimal health outcomes, OHNs use their expertise in health care delivery, knowledge of diverse service options, experience implementing return-to-work policies, and critical understanding of workers interface with their work environment.

RATIONALE

Since the late 1800's OHNs have delivered primary care, managed occupational and non-occupational illnesses and injuries, and implemented and evaluated numerous programs to benefit workers and their families. Skyrocketing healthcare and

workers' compensation benefit costs have forced employers to focus on cost containment strategies such as utilization of nurse case management, while maintaining quality of care. This has proven to be of value to the employer and insurers (Mullahy & Jensen).

However, case management is complex and requires well-prepared health care professionals who possess necessary knowledge and skills (e.g. occupational and environmental health and safety, return-to-work policies, health care delivery systems, payor systems, laws and regulations, and use of research-based clinical guidelines).

Effective occupational and environmental health and safety programs address overall healthcare, disability and workers' compensation costs. These programs:

- focus on primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention and health promotion strategies to minimize accidents and illnesses
- provide quality health care by knowledgeable and experienced occupational and environmental health professionals
- incorporate case management strategies
- facilitate effective communication between employers and injured or ill workers
- ensure workers are more knowledgeable, responsible, and confident consumers of health care services.

CONCLUSION

OHNs have a long history of demonstrating their

utility as clinicians and continue to support workers, their families, and their employers through various workplace healthcare delivery systems. As case managers they blend their clinical expertise, critical understanding of workers and their environments and the complex healthcare system with established guidelines to ensure that optimal health outcomes are achieved in a cost effective manner.

OHNs are ideal case managers as they are accustomed to balancing cost containment, while following existing guidelines to uphold a high level of quality care. OHNs are well known employee and employer advocates to ensure:

- the workers' needs and desired outcomes are achieved,
- legal and regulatory compliance for the employer, as well as utilization of cost containment strategies, and
- workers and employers are successfully navigating the complex healthcare system and taking advantage of the varied quality service options available.

Effective case management is one strategy for employers to not only quantify their health care costs but also to demonstrate savings and ensure quality care delivery through coordination of services. According to the Case Management Society of America (2011), many companies who collect case management evaluation data report return on investment (ROI) of 2:1 to 3:1 for their case management programs.

The OHN, acting as case manager and coordinator of health care services from the onset of illness or injury, through rehabilitation and return-to-work or an optimal alternative, is the key to ensure cost containment and quality health care among workers.

REFERENCES

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