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## POSITION STATEMENT

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### Health and Productivity: The Occupational and Environmental Health Nurse Role

#### THE CURRENT CLIMATE AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

Global economics are currently challenging every employer. During the next few years, companies must develop healthy, productive workforces engaged in every aspect of their business to survive and prosper in an increasingly global and competitive business environment. Developing an effective health and productivity program is the foundation for corporate success and translates to all corporations regardless of location. Present and actively engaged workers using their best creativity and innovation are fast becoming the primary global workforce goal in today's competitive business landscape. As the modern workplace continues to evolve with economic downturns, global competition, and rapid technology changes; i.e., information flows at digital speeds, a heightened need for employee creativity, cognitive ability, and mental capacity are essential. Workers today are faced with continuous change and uncertainty as they find new ways to function productively in this economy (TowersWatson, 2009/2010).

In the last ten years, a greater emphasis has been placed on reducing the cost of absenteeism and disability through effective case management and condition management programs. Proactive and progressive company executives are examining innovative ways to tackle the challenges of low productivity and high worker turnover as well as increasing healthcare and disability costs. They believe they can substantially improve their business performance by improving work culture and investing in health programs for all workers. They understand the business reality of functioning in a competitive marketplace and the challenges of

providing a dynamic work environment to achieve more with less (TowersWatson, 2009/2010).

Occupational and environmental health nurses (OHNs), as strategic business partners in their companies' businesses, are champions of managing the health of worker populations, workers' families and the company itself. The primary focus of occupational and environmental health nursing has been and continues to be the promotion, restoration, and maintenance of worker health, prevention of illness and injury, and protection from occupational and environmental hazards (AAOHN). Working with colleagues, the OHN in any business organization brings creative, innovative healthcare solutions to the individual worker and the organization.

#### HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY SOLUTION

An effective health and productivity framework suggests investing in a comprehensive set of programs that address complex issues facing workers and span the entire health continuum from wellness to disability. Addressing health and injury risks, acute illness, chronic conditions, stress, and disability can reduce absences, lower benefits costs, improve productivity and, ultimately, better financial outcomes (TowersWatson, 2011-2012). But as critical as individual health is to population health management, a culture of health will ensure that individuals who change health behaviors are truly supported in their efforts.

Health and productivity management (HPM) is the process of coordinating many types of programs and services designed to address all dimensions of worker health; these programs and services include all prevention programs and services, and those that workers access when they are sick, injured, or

balancing work/life issues. Examples of these programs and services include health benefits, disability and workers' compensation programs, employee assistance programs (EAPs), paid sick programs. HPM also includes activities meant to enhance morale, reduce turnover, and increase on-the-job productivity such as those that result from strong, healthy workplaces. Occupational and environmental health nurses, working with colleagues in medicine, human resources, benefits, and safety, jointly manage health and productivity initiatives (ACOEM).

### CRITICAL ROLE FOR OHNS

As recognized leaders in workplace health and safety, occupational and environmental health nurses affect the bottom line of businesses through comprehensive worker population health management. This work becomes more critical as the general population and workforce ages and chronic diseases increase. Contributing to policy and programmatic aspects of worker health, OHNs are in the best position to identify determinants of health and wellness, engage workers in developing healthy behaviors, integrate cost-saving strategies, align occupational and environmental health services with business goals, attain employer and worker buy-in, safeguard privacy rights, address legal issues, and facilitate communication and collaboration among departments, professionals, outside vendors, and community agencies. Therefore, the OHN is the key to creating healthy and productive workplaces that:

Support, promote and actively engage workers to improve their health

Identify organizational barriers and influence changes to create a healthy organizational culture

Identify and implement innovative ways to impact the demands of work and personal life

Improve energy, resilience, and productivity, which can positively impact health care costs and business success.

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