OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSING IN NORTH AMERICA

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSES IN THE UNITED STATES

Occupational health nursing in the United States was first documented in the late nineteenth century when two graduate nurses were hired specifically to provide care for workers. Betty Moulter was employed by a group of coal mining companies in 1888 to provide care for employees and their families and Ada Mayo Stewart was selected by the Vermont Marble Company in 1895. In the years surrounding the turn of the century, nurses were employed in retail stores, hotels and insurance companies in addition to industrial settings. From these early beginnings the field of occupational health has grown to encompass approximately 15,000 registered nurses working in occupational health settings in the US. Over five thousand occupational health nurses are current members of the American Association of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN); over 12,000 are board certified by the American Board for Occupational Health Nurses (ABHOIN).

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSING IN CANADA

Nursing training in Canada for “Registered Nurse” is for the most part Baccalaureate entry. Unlike Europe Canada does not have any prerequisites in place for OHN training. Once the nurse has graduated many RN’s simply answer advertisements and find themselves jobs in the OH setting; then proceed to educate themselves focusing on their newly learned skills and duties.

Canada like the USA has an Occupational Health Nurse Certification Process in place. This certification process was first developed by OH nurses from across Canada and was tailored to look similar, but not identical to the ABOHN process. There is a “reciprocity” arrangement for OHN’s in Canada and the USA. Occupational health services for the most part are provided by OHN’s who are employed by individual companies.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSES

- Disease/Injury Prevention: Both occupational and non-occupational
  - To prevent chronic illness, must prevent obesity
  - To prevent acute illness, must prevent the spread of resistant microorganisms
  - To prevent injury, must prevent risk-taking behavior and create a culture of safety

- Early Diagnosis and Treatment: Both occupational and non-occupational
  - Occupational health nurse practitioners are trained to provide both primary care and care of occupational illnesses and injuries through screening, examination and treatment.
  - Early return to work
  - Health Promotion: Essential to controlling health care costs and maintaining business health
  - Health Coaching replaces health education
  - Exercise and nutrition are linked to the incidence of most chronic diseases

NURSING RESEARCH

- The effect of health promotion programs on worker health and company profit (e.g., lactation, exercise, nutrition, weight control, tobacco cessation)
- Identifying the effect of worker productivity (e.g., presenteeism, absenteeism) on company profit and efficiency
- Work hazards of health care, farming, transportation, construction and little studied occupations (i.e., taxi drivers, migrant workers)
- Occupational health sciences, e.g., ergonomics, toxicology, safety
- Common illnesses that affect U.S. adults, e.g., diabetes, cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disease, musculoskeletal disorders, cancer
- Meeting the needs of aging employees to create an efficient workforce
- Business and leadership issues (e.g., workers’ compensation, productivity, work environments, incivility and violence)

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