POSITION STATEMENT

Health Promotion and Productivity in the Workplace: The Occupational and Environmental Health Nurse Role in Supporting the Workforce Using NIOSH’s Total Worker Health® Approach

INTRODUCTION

As the largest group of healthcare providers serving the workforce, Occupational Health Nurses (OHNs) play a vital role in supporting health promotion and increased productivity in the workplace. Occupational Health Nurses possesses advanced education and training enabling them to serve as active members and leaders of the multidisciplinary team. They support employee health promotion and increased productivity by providing education, conducting and translating research to practice, and delivering skilled nursing interventions to advance the health, safety and productivity of domestic and global workforces (American Association of Occupational Health Nurses, n.d.). The OHNs' holistic approach ensures that healthcare delivery encompasses health promotion and safety protection for workers, worker populations, their families, and community groups. Additionally, OHNs utilize their healthcare expertise and business knowledge to secure a safe and healthful work environment with a “healthy” bottom line (AAOHN).

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health’s (NIOSH’s) (2018) Total Worker Health® (TWH®) approach seeks to improve well-being in the American workforce for the benefit of workers, employers, and the nation by protecting safety and enhancing health and productivity. Promoting a healthier workforce has also been recognized by business leaders as a means of confronting rising healthcare costs. Improved productivity combined with health promotion results in improved workforce performance and cost containment (The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, n.d). The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) supports NIOSH’s Total Worker Health® approach.

The American Association of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN) joins ACOEM in its support of NIOSH’s Total Worker Health® approach to advance worker well-being and endorses the role of OHNs in using the TWH approach to support health promotion and increased productivity in the workplace.

RATIONALE

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health’s TWH® approach integrates policies, programs, and practices to protect workers from work-related safety and health hazards through promotion of injury and illness prevention efforts to advance worker well-being (NIOSH). This holistic approach to worker well-being strives to improve the health, safety, work environment and productivity of our nation’s workers, employers and businesses and supports the end goal of improving healthcare delivery and reducing healthcare and business expenditures.

As the professional association of licensed nurses engaged in the practice of occupational and environmental health nursing, AAOHN’s vision is that work and workplace community environments will be healthy and safe. The members of AAOHN aim to ensure that OHNs are viewed as the authority on health, safety, productivity and disability management for worker populations. As such, the organization seeks to advance the profession through (AAOHN):
• innovative professional and leadership development activities,
• advocating for legislation,
• implementing and advocating for public policy,
• recognizing the value OHNs provide to employers, employees, and governmental bodies,
• formation of alliances with other organizations, and
• addressing the distinct roles that OHNs serve within businesses.

Developing and implementing holistic approaches to employee health promotion, well-being, and productivity promotes a healthier workforce as well as corporate success in today’s competitive, global environment. The workplace continues to evolve with rapid technologic advancement, global competition and workforces, and rapid economic expansion requiring employees to possess high cognitive ability and mental capacity, creativity, and adaptability as they find new ways to function productively. Employers recognize that workers are more productive when they are healthier, emotionally and financially secure, and have a strong sense of social responsibility and inclusion (Willis Towers Watson, 2018). Wellbeing is evolving accordingly, and employers are placing greater focus on company culture and overall health and wellbeing initiatives. Many are building multi-dimensional health and wellbeing solutions that focus on employee needs and give the companies a competitive edge in retaining and hiring the best employees (Willis Towers Watson, 2018).

Employers are focusing on a list of top priorities in order to reduce costs incurred by employers and employees and improve workforce performance. These include (Willis Tower Watson):

• concentrating on clinical conditions associated with high-cost claims with a particular focus on metabolic syndrome/diabetes, musculoskeletal disease and mental/behavioral health,
• improving management of pharmacy costs, particularly specialty pharmacy cost and utilization,
• encouraging greater use of high-performance networks, centers of excellence and telemedicine to ensure appropriate, cost-effective and high-quality care,
• considering the addition of low point-of-care cost plans as an option rather than an all account-based health plan lineup, and
• improving employee total wellbeing, including physical, social, emotional and financial wellbeing through connection with corporate culture and the employee value proposition.

Occupational and Environmental Health Nurses, as strategic corporate business partners, are champions of managing the health of worker populations, workers’ families and the company itself. As collaborative members of the multidisciplinary team, OHNs play a vital role in creating and sustaining a corporate culture of health by supporting increased productivity, risk reduction, and health promotion among businesses and their workforce. OHNs are unique in their ability to utilize the nursing process to assess, plan and educate using a proactive, holistic approach to support a culture of health. This will ensure that individuals who implement changes in their health behaviors are truly supported in their efforts.

Occupational Health Nurses also serve as managers and business leaders; they are able to demonstrate and articulate how their services support the corporate mission, goals, and culture, and impact the bottom line. The OHN can provide practical information and guide the process of demonstrating value by using best practices (Mastroianni, 2017). Demonstrating value by documenting the tangible and intangible benefits of occupational health nursing services is vital. Specific methods for demonstrating the value of occupational health nursing services can be found in the AAOHN Guide Demonstrating Value (Mastroianni, 2016).

Occupational Health Nurses must position programs and services as not only a business asset but also an essential component of business success (Mastroianni, 2016). OHNs must proactively communicate and promote their impact on businesses to all stakeholders within the company to demonstrate value.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As recognized leaders in workplace health and safety, OHNs affect the bottom line of businesses through comprehensive worker population health management. The NIOSH Total Worker Health® approach can be used by OHNs to integrate policies, programs, and practices to protect workers from work-related safety and health hazards through promotion of injury and illness prevention efforts to advance worker well-being. It has become more critical to use this type of holistic approach to worker health as employers transition to multi-dimensional...
health and wellbeing solutions in an effort to reduce costs and improve employee wellbeing and performance. As the largest group of healthcare providers serving the workforce, 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 and sustaining a corporate culture of health that incorporates a TWH® approach within a multidisciplinary team.

The American Association of Occupational Health Nurses recognizes that joint efforts such as implementation of the NIOSH Total Worker Health® approach to support the workforce, in alliance with organizations such as ACOEM, will support a modern approach to creating and sustaining a culture of health.

REFERENCES


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