



Occupational health nursing course in India: Stakeholder's perspective

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This paper attempts to take the views of stakeholders of occupational health about the occupational health nursing (OHN) courses in India. **Materials and Methods:** A questionnaire was developed to gather the requisite information and was mailed to the stakeholders such as academicians, occupational health physicians, workers, factory owners and nurses to get their opinion about the OHN course in India. **Results:** This study was carried out among 90 stakeholders of occupational health in India, which included industry owners (29%), occupational health physicians and nurses (25.5% each) and academicians (20%). Most of the stakeholders were postgraduates while only 33.3% received training on occupational health services. Only 36.7% of the stakeholders were aware about any course on OCCUPATIONAL health nurse. 97.8% agreed for the need an OHN course in India and most of them (62.5%) suggested that 3-6 months should be the duration of such training course. Almost all believed (87.8%) that there are job prospects for such trained nurses. **Discussion:** Occupational health nurse is one of the important members of any occupational health team. This is a novice concept in India and according to the stakeholders there is a need of OHN manpower in India, which can be fulfilled through the commencement of a course to train such manpower.

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INTRODUCTION

Global economics is currently challenging every employer. During the next few years, companies must develop healthy, productive workforces engaged in every aspect of their business to prosper in an increasingly global and competitive business environment. Industrialization and urbanization have resulted in increased employment in the newer sectors though the traditional occupations like agriculture and mining still continue to employ a significant proportion of working population [1].

Health and safety at work, the socioeconomic status of a country and the quality of life and general wellbeing of working people are closely linked. Even in the Declaration on Occupational Health for All [2] governments are encouraged to develop

national policies and programs, which ensure that occupational health services are available for all workers. Such services should include the capacity building in terms of manpower skill development in occupational health.

In India also to respond to the rising burden of occupational diseases [3], occupational health services are required to be delivered through a multiprofessional occupational health team. Though occupational health nurse is an important member of an occupational health team it is generally acknowledged that in most developing countries the human resources engaged in occupational health services particularly occupational health nurses are deficient or at a very early stage of development. Many factors may play a role in the availability of such manpower such as awareness of employer regarding the importance of occupational health, need to develop such

manpower, job prospects for trained manpower, availability of training programs.

At present, in India there are no formal training programs for occupational health nurse [4]. Thus with this background this study was taken to understand the stakeholders perspective regarding occupational health nurses and need to develop a course for developing occupational health nurses.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a questionnaire based cross sectional study. A total of 90 stakeholders were included in the study. The stakeholder included those individuals who are either responsible for providing the occupational health nursing (OHN) course or are benefitted from this course. They principally include occupational health physician under whose supervision the occupational health nurse works, employers who shall be providing job opportunities to the trained nurses, academicians who will be entrusted with the responsibility of curriculum for them and the staff nurses who will be attending such courses if developed in future.

A questionnaire was developed for this study using thorough information search strategy through internet, printed journals and communication. The questionnaire included the questions such as occupational health awareness of stakeholder, existing status of OHN in India, need of any such course, job prospects for trained nurse, etc. The questionnaire was mailed to the stakeholders, and the data was collected for a period of 6 months, i.e., 1st September 2014 to 28th February 2015.

RESULTS

The present study was carried out among 90 stakeholders of occupational health in India. The basic characteristic of the stakeholders is depicted in Table 1. It can be observed that the majority were the industry owners (29%), followed by occupational health physicians and nurses (25.5% each) while academicians were 20%. Most of the stakeholders were possessing post-graduate educational qualification. However, only one-third of the stakeholders have received training on occupational health service.

The responses of the stakeholders regarding OHN course are shown in Table 2. It can be observed that only 36.7% of the stakeholders were aware about any course on occupational health nurse. Most of these knew this through electronic media such as internet and were of the opinion that such course is offered abroad and not in India. When asked about the need of such course in India, 97.8% agreed for the need while only one stakeholder was against such course and another one did not responded. Most of them (62.5%) responded that 3-6 months should be the duration of such training course. Almost all believed (87.8%) that there are job prospects for such trained nurses.

DISCUSSION

Since independence, the nursing education has grown rapidly with a significant rise in the infrastructure and manpower. The Indian Nursing Council, an autonomous body under the Government of India; Ministry of Health and Family Welfare which was constituted by the Central Government under section 3 (1) of the Indian Nursing Council Act, 1947 of parliament governs the nursing services and education in India [5]. There are several basic and additional qualifications offered by institutions and universities.

Most of the nurses doing the role of occupational health nurse are trained in General Nursing or in Pharmacy and have been placed in that role by sheer chance [6]. However in a workplace setting, it includes triage and transportation of the victim to the nearest advanced care facility after providing on-site first-aid. An occupational health nurse also requires special skills and knowledge in the fields of health education and counseling, environmental health, and rehabilitation.

Table 1: Basic characteristics of stakeholders (n=90)

Characteristics	Number (%)
Group	
Academician	18 (20.0)
Industry owners	26 (29.0)
Nurses	23 (25.5)
OH physicians	23 (25.5)
Education	
Graduate	37 (41.1)
Post graduate	53 (58.9)
OHS training received	
Yes	30 (33.3)
No	60 (66.7)

OH: Occupational health

Table 2: Responses on OHN course (n=90)

Characteristics	Number (%)
Know any course on OHN	
Yes	33 (36.7)
No	57 (63.3)
Source of such information	
Print media	1 (3.0)
Electronic media	19 (57.6)
Colleagues	10 (30.3)
Other	6 (9.1)
Place offering such course	
India	10 (30.3)
Abroad	23 (69.7)
OHN course is needed in India	
Yes	88 (97.8)
No	1 (1.1)
No response	1 (1.1)
Ideal duration of such course	
<3 months	9 (10.2)
3-6 months	55 (62.5)
7-12 months	18 (20.5)
>12 months	6 (6.8)
Job prospects for OHN	
Yes	79 (87.8)
No	10 (12.2)

OHN: Occupational health nursing

In the recent years, OHN is fast growing its influence at workplaces in India due to the economic liberalization and increasing presence of multinational companies which bring in their corporate guidelines as well as thinking that investing in human asset would give them competitive advantage [6].

Except for a short-term course run by Central Labour Institute, Mumbai on OHN no other course is available in this domain in India [4]. According to one of the studies, as per the existing norms laid down in the national legislation for non-hazardous and hazardous nature of industries approximately 53856 and 134640 occupational health nurses are required for the organized sector workforce [1]. Another nine times of this will be required to cater to the whole of the country's workforce.

However, any such program will require support from the stakeholders. The occupational health physicians who give instructions to the occupational health nurse is the most important person in occupational setup and thus he should also poss the appropriate qualification. However, due to limited resources to develop occupational health physicians, the occupational health nurse can be placed for some initial occupational health services.

Ideally, such a course should be offered in contact sessions mode through nursing schools in collaboration with occupational health institutions. The stakeholders believed that the duration of such course should be 3-4 months. This will help in developing more occupational health nurses in a given period of time, and as in many instances the candidates are sponsored by employers it will be cost effective also.

The response of stakeholders that there is need and job prospects for the occupational health nurses suggest that once trained nurses are available these stakeholders particularly the industry owners are willing to employ them. This could also be due to less remuneration to be paid to a nurse as compared to the doctor while fulfilling the obligation of providing occupational health services.

Thus, to conclude, it of utmost need to have training program for developing OHN manpower as the occupational health nurse play an important role in the prevention of occupational injury and disease through a comprehensive pro-active occupational health and safety strategy. They can also contribute to the promotion of health and work ability, by focusing on non-occupational, workplace preventable conditions that, while not caused directly by work, may affect the employees' ability to maintain attendance or performance at work, through a comprehensive workplace health promotion strategy [7,8]. They can also cater to the wider public health agenda by improving environmental health management.

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