



POSITION STATEMENT

Delivering Culturally-sensitive, Inclusive Care in the Workplace: The Occupational and Environmental Health Nurse Role

INTRODUCTION

Promoting a diverse and inclusive workforce has become a business priority among many companies, prompting them to implement inclusive policies and programs for nondiscrimination and equal benefits coverage. Research shows that diversity and inclusion in the workplace are crucial for business success and employee satisfaction as they have a positive impact on a company's bottom line and the ability to attract and retain talent (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2019). Anti-discrimination policies should address all types of discrimination including: age, race, sex, religion, national origin, language, education, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) status, and disability. Many populations at risk for discrimination face stigma, marginalization, and disparities even though there are federal laws prohibiting job discrimination (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2009). Among these, health disparities are particularly problematic as an individual's race or ethnicity, sex, gender identity, age, disability, socioeconomic status, and geographical location all contribute to an individual's ability to achieve good health (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP), 2019). Healthy People 2020 strives to improve the health of all groups by reducing health disparities in the U.S. population, particularly through prevention and early intervention at work, and among vulnerable populations such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals (ODPHP, 2018).

The American Association of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN) strongly supports antidiscrimination practices and policies that promote health equity and the delivery of culturally-sensitive inclusive care, particularly in the workplace health setting (AAOHN, 2019). AAOHN endorses the unique role of the occupational and environmental health nurse (OHN) to implement more inclusive and culturally-sensitive language, interventions,

and office processes to reduce barriers to clients seeking care. As a leader in the delivery of care in the workplace, the OHN is poised to implement education, training, support, and referral resources that are culturally sensitive and inclusive to reduce health disparities at work through prevention and early intervention within the workplace health setting (AAOHN, 2019).

RATIONALE

The workforce is becoming increasingly diverse, resulting in emerging safety and health issues. Many workers are more likely to have increased risks of work-related diseases and injuries, particularly if they are members of vulnerable populations such as minorities, recent immigrants, and workers with disabilities (ODHP, 2019). With the United States civilian workforce spending a quarter of their lifetime, and up to half of their waking lives, at work or commuting, the workplace provides a unique forum for public health action.

The practice of occupational and environmental health nursing focuses on health promotion and restoration, client protection, and disease and injury prevention within the workplace (AAOHN, 2019). The OHN uses an ethical framework as a basis for practice. The ethical criteria listed within the AAOHN Standards of Care include:

- protecting the rights of clients,
- delivering nursing care that is respectful of self-determination, self-care, and diverse attributes,
- advocating for client(s) autonomy, dignity, and rights, utilizing resources to facilitate ethical

decision-making and resolution of ethical dilemmas, and

- appropriately acting upon illegal, or unethical behavior that endangers or jeopardizes client(s).

The AAOHN Code of Ethics (2016) augments standards of nursing care, detailing the ethical values, obligations, duties and professional principles of OHNs individually and collectively. These include (among others):

- practicing with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth, and unique attributes of every person,
- promoting, advocating for, and protecting the rights, health, and safety of the client, and
- collaborating with other health professionals and the public to protect human rights, promote health, and reduce disparities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The specialized training, education and experience of OHNs prepares these professionals to deliver culturally-sensitive, inclusive care in the workplace. In combination with AAOHN practice resources (see [AAOHN Position Statement titled Delivery of Occupational and Environmental Health Nursing Services](#)), OHNs have established themselves as experts within the field of occupational and environmental health and are the key to the coordination of a holistic, multidisciplinary approach to delivery of safe, quality, and comprehensive occupational and environmental health programs and services.

As the professional association of licensed nurses engaged in the practice of occupational and environmental health nursing, AAOHN strongly supports the incorporation of processes, policies and practices that integrate culturally-sensitive, inclusive language, interventions, and processes to reduce health disparities in the workplace health setting.

Additional clinical resources for developing a more inclusive clinical setting are available at the [AAOHN website](#). These tools support the OHN to deliver healthcare in the workplace with respect and dignity. [Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People](#) (The World Professional Association for Transgender Health, 2011) are also available to support the OHN. Public health efforts aimed at improving the health of every person and eliminating health disparities by considering the perspectives and needs of LGBT people are available at the [Centers for Disease Control](#) website (Centers for Disease Control, 2018).

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