



POSITION STATEMENT

Delivery of Occupational and Environmental Health Nursing Services

INTRODUCTION

Occupational and environmental health nursing is the specialty practice that provides for and delivers health and safety programs and services to workers, worker populations and community groups. Significant advancements have reshaped the occupational and environmental healthcare delivery system in recent years including:

- a focus on health care cost reductions resulting in greater economic constraints and outsourcing or displacement of qualified occupational health care providers,
- an increase in health care providers with diverse professional backgrounds competing to deliver occupational health services,
- collaboration among various healthcare providers to support total worker population health management, rather than traditional provider models,
- increased emphasis on wellness, mental health and prevention to support worker productivity and presenteeism,
- evolving regulatory and compliance requirements from bodies such as OSHA, CDC and ADA
- pandemic preparedness and response including development of enhanced infection control protocols, and
- implementation of evidence-based research to guide clinical practice.

Notwithstanding the changing healthcare delivery system, the American Association of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN) posits that the specialized training, education and experience of professional occupational and environmental health nurses (OHNs) effectively prepares these professionals to continue to deliver high quality, comprehensive occupational and environmental health services in the workplace.

RATIONALE

As the largest single group of healthcare professionals providing healthcare in the workplace, OHNs are critical to delivery of high quality occupational and environmental health services to working populations across the world (WHO, 2001).

OHNs are historically at the frontline protecting and promoting the health of worker populations. As part of a larger multidisciplinary team, OHNs utilize their expertise to develop and implement comprehensive occupational and environmental health programs to:

- promote total worker health,
- decrease health-related costs for workers and their employers,
- improve employee morale and satisfaction,
- increase productivity,
- decrease absenteeism,
- facilitate continuity of care,
- promote and ensure regulatory and legal compliance,

- support the wellness and safety of worker populations whether they work in-person, remotely, or in a hybrid manner, and
- support the health and wellness of worker communities and their families during times of crises (i.e., during a pandemic), contributing to the overall health of the community-at-large.

The OHN is the key to the coordination of a holistic, multidisciplinary approach to delivery of safe, quality, and comprehensive occupational and environmental health programs and services. These may include:

- clinical and primary care, including assessment, diagnosis, management, and documentation of occupational and non-occupational illnesses and injuries,
- case management for occupational and non-occupational illnesses and injuries,
- health hazard assessment and surveillance of worker populations, workplaces, and community groups,
- investigation, monitoring, and analysis of illness and injury episodes and trends, as well as methods to promote and protect worker health and safety,
- compliance with laws, regulations, and standards governing health and safety for workers and the environment,
- management and administration of occupational and environmental health services,
- health promotion and disease prevention strategies using primary, secondary, and tertiary principles,
- counseling, health education, and training programs using adult learning approaches, and
- research related to occupational and environmental health.

OHNs have established themselves as experts and leaders in occupational health by combining their unique training, education, and experience with practice resources such as:

- *The AAOHN Competencies in Occupational and Environmental Health Nursing* (2015),
- *The AAOHN Code of Ethics* (2016),
- *The AAOHN Standards of Occupational Health Nursing* (2019),

- *Fundamentals of Occupational and Environmental Health Nursing: AAOHN Core Curriculum – 5th Edition* (2022), and
- *Peer-reviewed, evidence-based research publications supporting occupational health nursing practice.*

Additionally, as many as 3,500 practicing occupational health nurses have demonstrated their occupational health expertise by passing a specialty examination and completing the rigorous qualifying educational and experience standards required of certification through the American Board for Occupational Health Nurses, Inc. (ABOHN, 2021)

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

A coordinated and cost-effective plan that maximizes the use of services for workers can be best administered by a qualified OHN who has knowledge of the needs and various services available and works within the scope of practice within his/her licensure state and the Standards of Occupational & Environmental Health Nursing.

While well trained OHNs are a key component to the delivery of high quality occupational and environmental health services in the workplace and are essential to providing cost-effective workplace programs, AAOHN acknowledges that in some situations it is not feasible or appropriate to utilize full-time OHNs.

In order to determine and meet the unique occupational health needs of worker populations, it is recommended that employers:

- conduct a feasibility study to prioritize the worker health management needs and determine the extent to which OHNs would be effective supporting the health of the population in a cost-effective manner, and
- employ OHNs as staff members, consultants, or contract providers to coordinate delivery of care and lead the multidisciplinary team in addressing the overall health needs of the employee population.

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