

Occupational health nurses' activity after general health examination for workers

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Abstract. The condition of occupational health nurse's role after performing general health examination in companies with part-time or full-time occupational health physicians was surveyed. Occupational health nurses were more active in companies with part-time occupational health physicians than those with full-time physicians. © 2006 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

In Japan, an employer is obligated to perform a general health examination (GHE) for workers in accordance with the Occupational Safety and Health law, and workers are required by the law to undergo the GHE that the employer provides. It is also necessary for the employer to obtain physician's opinion regarding the GHE results, and to provide health care support related to GHE results. This health care after GHE is one of the most important occupational health (OH) cares in companies, and is provided by OH nurses, especially in small-scale companies, the number of which has increased during the recent years because of economic recession in Japan.

The role of the OH nurse should receive as much attention as the role of the OH physician, because large companies, which are required to employ full-time OH physicians, will go under the economic reconstruction phenomenon. Research on working conditions for OH nurses shows that they need more organized support to improve health management in companies [1]. It has also been proposed in a study on OH nurses' role that OH nurse education programs should be introduced systematically [2].

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In Japan, any company employing 50 or more workers is obligated to provide an OH physician and any company with 1000 or more workers must provide a full-time OH physician. However, there is no legal system in a case of employment of OH nurses. Although an OH nurse has lesser authority on OH system in companies than an OH physician, (s)he is expected to promote OH system quality. Promotion of OH service would be helpful to GHE issues, which is carried out to maintain health care support for workers.

Therefore, in this study, the present condition of OH nurse's role after performing GHE was surveyed and compared across companies employing full-time OH physicians with those employing part-time OH physicians to promote OH quality in small-scale companies.

2. Methods

Questionnaires that included items on OH nurse's role after GHE were mailed to 41 companies employing OH nurses belonging to the Occupational Nurse Research Association in Yamaguchi prefecture. The questionnaires comprised items related to GHE issues including report of the GHE results to all workers, hearing the GHE results from physicians, health care support related to the GHE results, submission of summary reports on the GHE to Labor Standard Inspection Office, duties of the OH physician, and those of the OH nurse after performing GHE. GHE was defined as health examination carried out regularly once a year for a worker, and special health examination for workers with harmful duty was not excluded.

All of the OH nurses were employed as full-time. The nature of companies was not asked because a possibility of a company specification using the answer was not excluded completely. In a cover letter asking for participation in the survey, we requested the companies to get answers to the questions from OH nurses of the corresponding companies, and to return by mail without mentioning their name. The cover letter included notes that the confidentiality will be maintained and the use of data obtained will be confined to the survey. After completion, a postcard containing answers to the questions was returned by postal mail.

We collected questionnaires returned by 25 companies but included 24 in our analysis, as one questionnaire from a health examination agency was considered unsuitable. The respondents were classified according to OH physician employment situation (full-time and part-time), and the present condition of OH nurse's role after performing GHE was compared between them.

3. Results

Among the 24 companies, 10 OH physicians were employed full-time and 14 part-time. Although GHE results were reported to all workers individually in 100% of companies, physician's opinion regarding GHE results were obtained in 86% of companies with part-time OH physicians comparing with 100% of those with full-time OH physicians. Health care support related to GHE results were performed by 90% of OH nurses and 70% of OH physicians in companies which employed full-time OH physicians, but by 100% of OH nurses and 50% of OH physicians in those which employed part-time OH physicians. In

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