OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY
STUDY NOTES

TOPIC 1 OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

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23 INTRODUCTION

Workers are exposed to factors, problems or hazards at work which affect their health and well-being. In industries, workers are frequently exposed to serious physical, chemical, emotional and biological risks or hazards which can result to injuries, accidents, illness disabilities and death, hence the need for occupational health. Since most workers spend reasonable amount of time at work daily, the hazards cannot be overlooked, hence we need occupational health services to promote the health, safety and well-being of workforce. In this unit, you should learn the definition, scope and evolution of occupational health.

OBJECTIVES
At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- define occupational health
- identify the aims and objectives of occupational health
- highlight the advantages of occupational health and safety
- explain the scope of occupational health
- describe the evolution of occupational health.

5888 Definition of Occupational Health

Occupational health has been defined in various ways:

- Occupational health can be referred to as the creation of a state of physical and mental well-being within the occupational environment while taking into consideration factors relating to the social and domestic life of individual.
- Occupational health is also the provision of public healthcare for all people gainfully employed. It takes into account the study of all factors influencing the health of workers at their places of work as well as at home.
- A joint ILO/WHO committee defines occupational health as “The promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental, and social well-being of workers in all occupations.”

The ILO recommendation 112, of 1959 defines occupational health as follows:

- Protecting the worker against any health hazard which may arise out of their work or the condition in which it is carried on.
- Contributing towards the physical and mental adjustment in particular by the adaptation of the work to the workers and the assignment to jobs for which they are suited.
- Contributing to the establishment and maintenance at the highest degree of physical, social and mental well-being of workers.

In other words, it is the prevention of departures from health among workers, caused by their working conditions, the protection of workers in their employment from risks resulting from factors adverse to health, the placing and maintenance of the workers in occupational environment adapted to their physiological and psychological well-being and the adaptation of work to man and each man to his job (WAHEB, 1991:139).
Aims and Objectives of Occupational Health

The aims and objectives of occupational health include:

- the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental, and social well-being of workers in all occupations
- the prevention among workers of departures from health caused by working conditions
- the protection of workers in their employment from risks resulting from factors adverse to health.
- the planning and maintenance of workers in an occupational environment adapted to his physiological equipment
- the adaptation of work to man and each man to his job
- to provide emergency care and prevention of injuries and illness on the job
- to offer adequate advice and rehabilitation services for workers who are injured and for those with psychological problems
- to maintain accurate morbidity and mortality records of workers
- to generate awareness and create safety consciousness in the workers of various cadres
- to create health facilities and services where they are easily accessible and available
- to reduce the risk of injury and health impairment of workers arising from exposures to hazards in working environments.

Advantages of Occupational Health and Safety

The advantages of occupational health and safety programmes include:

- enactment of laws specifying payment to workers for industrial accidents or for illness caused by the occupation
- helping workers to become enlightened about the protection of their rights and that their duties are well defined and attended to.
- ensuring suitable job placement
- promoting better health and ensuring longer life
- lowering personal medical costs
- sustaining employee earnings
- ensuring greater job satisfaction
- contributing to prosperity of the community
- decreasing welfare costs and improving public relations.

Scope of Occupational Health
The scope of occupational health is divided into three:

- occupational medicine
- industrial hygiene and safety services
- industrial welfare services.

**Occupational Medicine**

Occupational medicine is concerned with the curative treatment/services provided for the workers. It includes:

- **Health assessment, which include pre-employment, pre-placement and periodic medical examination**

- Pre-employment medical examination

Pre–employment medical examination should be carried out on all new employees to provide a base line data and also ensure that the job is suitable for the individual state of health. The health assessment in some cases may be through the confidential health questionnaires while in other cases it may be through the use of real medical and physical examinations.

The medical and laboratory investigations performed actually depend on the types of organisation and processes involved and hazards exposed to. Examples of these investigations are chest x-ray for those whose work involve being in contact with dust, visual acuity test for those who will be welding or examining specimen under microscopes; stool test for food handlers in the canteen etc.

These tests will enable the occupational health unit determine whether an individual is fit or not for a particular job.

- Pre–placement medical examination

This type of examination can also be performed on a new employee but it is mostly performed when an employee is changing from one job or unit to another in the establishment. This may be as a result of injury or illness. The objective is to put him in the area most suitable for his health and capability without further risk to his health.

(iii) Periodic medical examination
Periodic medical examination is carried out at regular intervals after the initial pre-employment and pre-placement medical examinations. The medical examination could be carried out weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annually in order to treat and prevent the spread of diseases from affecting other vulnerable personnel in the workplace.

- **Curative function which include treatment of occupational and non-occupational diseases**

This includes the treatment of occupational and non-occupational ailments of workers. Sick workers are encouraged to report early, whether or not the illness is as a result of the occupation or not. The treatment is to prevent degeneration and spread of the ailment to other workers. The occupational health team should ensure the cooperation of other relevant agencies to ensure optimum treatment and early rehabilitation.

- **Family health services**

The management should provide industrial clinic or hospital or retainership in order to have a complete knowledge about the health history of workers and their social problems. The treatment of dependants is important in that it prevents workers from taking time off-work to seek medical help for their family members outside the work environment thereby resulting in decreased productivity.

- **Promotion and rehabilitation in health services**

Health promotion services are aimed at improving workers’ health, morals and productivity as well as controlling health care costs. The services include: exercise and fitness programmes, stress management, safety education and first aid, posters, pamphlets, newsletters, journals, health seminar/workshop to educate workers. Rehabilitation is aimed at restoring the patient to his fullest physical, mental, and social capability. It must start immediately after the injury and restoration activities commenced and gradually done in stages as dictated by the health and capability of the patient. Restoration of physical, social and mental health of the patient is achieved through the use of drugs, exercises, psychotherapy, speech therapy, walking etc.

3.2.2 **Industrial Hygiene and Safety Services**

Industrial hygiene and safety services are concerned with the environmental hygiene and safety of the work place. It consists of:

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