Healthy Practice Environments

Educational Planning for Establishing a Health-Promoting Workplace (HPW)

The Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses (AMSN) has had an ongoing series of articles related to Healthy Practice Environments. The AMSN website (www.amsn.org) also has a number of articles and documents about initiatives that AMSN has undertaken to promote healthy practice environments in healthcare settings. This article will focus on the educational work necessary for nurses who desire to increase the healthiness of their workplace. The work is not easy, but the end result could be one that leaves a lasting legacy for those who work in that environment.

The concept of a health-promoting workplace (HPW) is particularly relevant in today's global marketplace. Businesses wanting to compete nationally or globally should ensure a healthy, qualified, motivated, and safe workforce. An HPW can create a flexible and dynamic balance between meeting the needs of customers, employees’ skills, and health needs. This multifactorial focus can assist companies and organizations to better compete in the marketplace by facilitating healthy practice environments. Nurses are uniquely prepared and qualified to educate employers, employees, workforces, and companies on how to achieve this goal.

In 1997, the World Health Organization (WHO) developed the Luxembourg Declaration as a way to increase safety in the workplace. The WHO also determined that practice environments should promote healthy living in all aspects of people’s lives. According to the WHO, the workplace is an ideal arena for health promotion because of the ability of the workplace to offer physical, mental, economic, and social well-being. Additionally, the workplace could offer a setting suited to promote the health of its employees, which may extend to homes, families, and communities.

During that time, the WHO focused its attention specifically on manufacturing and business environments. The intention was to increase the safety of workers in those environments, as that had been the arena where most work-related injuries occurred. However, because job-related death/injury rates were lower in settings employing predominately women (such as hospitals), safety measures in those areas focused more on patient safety and less on employee safety (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2013). The rise of AIDS and Hepatitis B prompted the first true focus on safety of health care workers in the modern era of medicine (CDC, 2013).

The Luxembourg Declaration provides guidance for promoting health and safety strategies that can be included in the workplace to promote health of employees (WHO, 1997). Other advantages of using the workplace to promote safety and health include educating individuals on how to alleviate health risk factors for themselves and also for their families. The Luxembourg guidelines recommend that, to achieve these goals, the following four aspects must be included: 1) all staff must be actively involved; 2) the health promotion programs must be integrated in all important decisions and in all areas of the organization; 3) all measures and programs have to be oriented to a problem-solving cycle including needs analysis, setting priorities, planning, implementation, continuous control, and evaluation; and 4) the health promotion must include both individual-directed and environment-directed measures from various fields, combining risk reduction efforts as well as the development of built-in protection for workers, along with education related to health potentials (WHO, 1997).

One example of an educational program designed to improve health in the workplace can be noted in the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP). The ENWHP began a 2-year initiative in February 2014 to improve the health and safety of their employees. To begin their initiative, they used the WHO definition of workplace health promotion, which states, “the combined efforts of employees, employers, and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work” (WHO, 1997). Prior to implementing the initiative, ENWHP conducted research that demonstrated workplace health promotion had to include information beyond just the work being done. Focus would also have to be placed on those things not sufficiently covered by legislation, company policies, or occupational directives. For example, promoting healthy lifestyles such as good nutrition, adequate sleep, smoking cessation, and sufficient exercise could be included in edu-

If you have any questions or comments regarding the “Healthy Practice Environments” column, or if you are interested in writing, please contact Column Editor Deidra B. Dudley at deidradudley@hotmail.com.

### Table 1.
The Benefits of a Healthy Practice Environment

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<tr>
<th>Advantages to Employees</th>
<th>Organizational Advantages</th>
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<tr>
<td>A safe and healthy practice environment</td>
<td>A well-managed health and safety program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhanced self-esteem</td>
<td>A positive and caring image</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduced stress</td>
<td>Improved staff morale</td>
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<td>Improved morale</td>
<td>Reduced absenteeism</td>
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<td>Increased job satisfaction</td>
<td>Increased productivity</td>
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<td>Increased skills for health protection</td>
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Source: Adapted from WHO, 1997.
cational programs. Organizations should also recognize the influence of factors outside the workplace on their employees, such as family, marriage, life situations, and environmental stressors. Organizational education promoting healthy practice environments should begin with initiatives aimed at all employees. It has been found that there are advantages for employees at all levels of the organization as well as for the organization itself when a culture of workplace health is implemented. Table 1 shows advantages to both the individual employee as well as the organization when health workplace initiatives are in place.

The first step to educating a workplace on how to become healthy is to introduce the concept of a health-promoting workplace (HPW) to all employees. The people responsible for teaching the employees will need a solid understanding of the social structure and organizational psychology of the company in order to improve the efficiency of the educational program. Additionally, the people leading the educational initiative should understand marketing techniques, as well as planning and implementation strategies specific to the company. A full organizational analysis should be done prior to implementing a healthy workplace educational program, as each company has unique attributes that should be considered.

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) researched early phases of organizations that implemented healthy workplace educational programs (ENWHP, 2014). One commonality found in each of the programs was the multiplicity and continuation required – meaning several steps were involved in the process, and the education needed to be ongoing in order to be effective. Each described a series of programs involving strategies to assist employees to buy into the importance of the initiative. One organization used a historical perspective from the 1970s to show that a healthy practice environment was not a new concept. Another group used a continuum of unhealthy behavior compared to one of health and wellness to illustrate the importance of embracing the initiative. Most companies also included information about individual health and gave examples of how organizational health and employee health are interrelated. Inherent throughout the process to implement HPW is the need to determine what data will be used to demonstrate quality improvements. Absenteeism, surveys related to employee morale, pre- and post-implementation questionnaires, reduction in costs, reduction in work-related injuries, and employee self-reporting on healthy behaviors are a few examples of data that organizations may want to obtain to determine outcomes and effectiveness of their programs.

Participation is another important element for an effective HPW education program. Employees, management, stockholders, and members of the board should be included in all phases of planning, implementation, and evaluation of the HPW initiative. Safety and health promotion should remain high priorities for any HPW educational plan. A health-promoting workplace recognizes that a healthy workforce is essential and integrates policies, systems, and practices conducive to improving health and safety at all levels of the organization. A well-thought out educational plan to implement and practice HPW is the key to success for any nurse wanting to promote health and safety on the units, hospitals, and areas where they practice. Nurses should be at the forefront of teaching and educating everyone about the importance of HPW and developing educational programs to accomplish the task.

References

Suggested Readings

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