



POSITION STATEMENT

Case Management: The Occupational and Environmental Health Nurse Role

Occupational and environmental health nurse case managers are the ideal professionals to coordinate workers' health care services from the onset of illness or injury to safe return-to-work or an optimal alternative.

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1800's, occupational and environmental health nurses (OHNs) have delivered primary care, managed occupational and non-occupational illnesses and injuries, and implemented and evaluated a myriad of programs to benefit workers. To assist workers in achieving optimal health outcomes, occupational and environmental health nursing professionals use their expertise in health care delivery, knowledge diverse service options, experience in implementing return-to-work policies, and detailed, site-specific understanding of how workers interface with the work environment.

Based on the complexities of health care and business environments, case management services must be delivered by qualified health care professionals with sufficient knowledge and expertise to perform this function competently (CMSA).

Case management is a process of coordinating comprehensive health care services, following illness or injury, to achieve optimum quality care delivered in a cost effective manner. The process integrates assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation components. Occupational and environmental health nurses as case managers provide all or a portion of these services in addition to coordination of all care delivered (American Association of Occupational Health Nurses

[AAOHN], Case Management Society of America [CMSA], and Mullahy & Jensen).

RATIONALE

Effective occupational and environmental health and safety programs address overall health care, disability and workers' compensation costs. These programs:

- focus on primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention and health promotion strategies to minimize accidents and illnesses
- provide quality health care by knowledgeable and experienced occupational and environmental health professionals
- incorporate case management strategies
- facilitate effective communication between management and injured or ill workers
- teach workers to be more knowledgeable, responsible, and confident consumers of health care services.

Skyrocketing increases in basic health care premiums and workers' compensation costs have forced employers to focus on cost containment strategies. Many corporations now offer their workers health benefit plans that include integrated options. With an increasing focus on health care cost containment, the case management function is valuable to the employer and insurers (Mullahy & Jensen). However, case management is complex and requires well-prepared health care professionals who possess necessary knowledge and skills (e.g. occupational and environmental health and safety,

return-to-work policies, health care delivery systems, payor systems, laws and regulations).

CONCLUSION

Today's proactive practitioners are cognizant of:

- the workers' needs and desired outcomes,
- the employer's priorities and focus on cost containment strategies
- the many service options available.

Effective case management is one strategy for employers to not only quantify their health care costs but also savings through coordination of services.

The OHN professional, acting as a coordinator of health services, rehabilitation, return-to-work and case management, is the key to workers' health care quality and cost containment strategies.

REFERENCES

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