

## **Employees' Assistance Programs & Occupational Health Nursing. Is there a conflict or a challenge?**

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### **Editorial**

Contemporary health and safety issues are strictly related with employees' mental health. A bidirectional relationship between health and work has to do, more or less with psychological aspects. Work may affect positively or negatively employees' health. It is a common determinant of stress or emotional disturbances. On the other side, determinants out of the working environment, like family or social surroundings may adversely impact mental health reducing resilience, performance and safe behavior. Within this framework, the role of work psychologist as a part of the health and safety team is significant.

In many countries Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are implemented. EAPs are intended to support employees dealing with personal problems that may affect their job performance, health and well-being. The origin of these programs date 50 years ago, when alcoholism was a significant problem for the industrial workplace.

EAPs are offered by the employers and their use is free, volunteer and confidential. Furthermore, they usually cover dependents of the employees. Counseling is mainly given by telephone individual calls. In some cases individual counseling may be provided in the workplace respecting confidentiality. Counseling involves: Emotional distress, occupational stress, alcohol or drug abuse, domestic violence, work relationship problems, health concerns, conflicts, life events like accident, death, undesired pregnancy etc.

EAPs currently respond to more complicated needs of companies, like crisis management, psychological support of employees with chronic health problems, elaboration of policies for undesired situations with respective training of people to deal with, assessment of people with unusual comportment, assessment of occupational stress and psychosocial factors within a company. EAPs beyond occupational stress management are evolving into providers of wellbeing programs in the workplace. Although their dramatic grow, EAPs have been criticized for focusing interventions at the individual rather than the organizational level and for lack of impartiality, since they are provided by the employers. Effectiveness of these programs has been called into question, but it is likely that they have a positive impact on employee's mental health and they are well accepted by them [1, 2].

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How do Occupational Health Nurses (OHNs) come with EAPs? Is there any conflict or a complement? OHNs have a direct and permanent contact and trusted relations with employees, they are aware of workers' health status and can early detect behavioral problems related to psychological burden or even hiding mental disorders. OHNs may therefore promote the use of EAPs services by those employees which really need them. The role of EAPs is very helpful to evaluate fitness to work for people with mental disorders and to support their incorporation at the workplace. Therefore, co-operation with occupational health professionals is obvious. OHNs get through EAPs a knowledgeable ally for the permanent surveillance of people with psychological problems, their appropriate support and counseling [3].

OHNs with occupational physicians, have a significant role to induce organizational changes focusing at the reduction of the occupational stress and other work-related burden. They achieve so to cover relative deficit of EAPs.

In addition to the health surveillance of the employees, OHNs using their skills and knowledge, have a leading role in the health promotion programs [4]. Health promotion actually aims to modify individual's behavior and attitudes in their daily life. This is a not achievable goal if the work has a negative health impact, causing low self-esteem, stress, fatigue, etc. People with psychological problems become frequently smokers, overweight, alcoholics, without physical activity and with limited social relations. This is the priority group for an effective health promotion intervention. A health promotion program is much promising, if it combines cognitive and behavioral methodology with parallel organizational interventions. This is a challenge for an interdisciplinary approach, cultivating a team-work spirit and an harmonious relationship in a workplace.

## References

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