

Promotion of a healthy workplace in the health sector

The WHO has defined a healthy workplace as one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and well-being of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace by considering the following, based on identified needs: health and safety concerns in the physical work environment; health, safety and well-being concerns in the psychosocial work environment including organization of work and workplace culture; personal health resources in the workplace; and ways of participating in the community to improve the health of workers, their families and other members of the community.¹

This definition is intended chiefly to address primary prevention, which entails, the prevention of injuries or illnesses from happening in the first place. However, secondary and tertiary prevention may also be included by employer-provided occupational health services.¹ Also, this definition, is intended to create a workplace environment that does not cause re-injury or reoccurrence of an illness when someone returns to work after being away with an injury or illness, whether work-related or not.¹ In addition, it is intended to mean a workplace that is supportive and accommodating of older workers, or those with chronic diseases or disabilities.¹ A healthy workplace is particularly important in the health sector.

Hospitals and health services are generally considered as relatively unhealthy workplaces for health workers, who may experience various physical and psycho-social burdens during work hours.² As a result, the workplace can aggravate the health of health workers and therefore it is a necessity to have a healthy workplace for the health workers.

Promotion of healthy workplaces includes three main components, which generally is within the responsibility of management. These three main components, include : a healthy and safe

workplace; staff training in health promotion skills aiming at better health gain for patients and community; and health promotion activities for staff.²

Five standards have been developed and evaluated by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Network of Health Promoting Hospitals and Health Services (HPH) for health promotion in hospitals.^{2,3} These standards are: Standard 1: Management Policy; Standard 2: Patient Assessment; Standard 3: Patient Information and Intervention; Standard 4: Promoting a Healthy Workplace; and Standard 5: Continuity and Cooperation. They have included basic promotion of healthy workplaces in their standards and indicators for health promotion in hospitals and the fourth WHO/HPH Standard deals directly with promoting a healthy workplace.^{2,3} These standards and indicators are directly and easily implementable in hospitals.

The first of the WHO/HPH standards addresses management policy. This includes the implementation of written policy for health promotion aimed at patients, relatives and health workers.²

Hospitals and health services are generally dangerous workplaces. The health workers are exposed to noise, contact with chemicals, radiation, viral hazards and other potentially harmful factors.² In addition, the health work is often physically demanding and includes unhealthy postures, prolonged standing and heavy lifting. As a result, health workers are at the risk of work-related injuries and infections despite the availability of preventive strategies.²

The psychosocial burden on health workers is also important as health workers are faced with working conditions that can include night shifts, lack of influence on planning of work, high expectations from patients, relatives and management - as well as striving to meet their own high ambitions of solving all problems, smoothing out the patient pathways and leaning the administration without feeling/ showing

stress and burn-out.² The psycho-social burdens are further aggravated by economic downturn.² As a result of these challenges, a healthy and safe workplace is a necessity.

The WHO/HPH Standards specify that an important part of promoting a healthy workplace is to secure teaching and training of health workers in patient-aimed health

promotion.² This will enhance their skills. Trained health workers can reach out to patients in need of health promotion and such training has immense effect on success rates.²

WHO/HPH standard four on promotion of a healthy workplace reflects the fundamental importance of supporting health workers to lead healthy lives in and outside the workplace. This includes, for example, availability of smoking cessation programmes, provision of physical training facilities and so forth.² The availability of health enhancing choices to health workers, ensures that the health workers are healthier. The health workers are also in a position to advocate healthy living, which in return ends up benefiting patients. Thus, a health worker targeted health promotion policy can help improve the survival rate among patients.²

Promotion of healthy workplaces for the health sector will be beneficial to the health workers, patients and communities.

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