



HEALTH PROMOTION ACTIVITIES IN MODERN WORKPLACE: THE ROLES OF THE EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

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Abstract:

The concept of the workplace health promotion is becoming increasingly relevant as more private and public organizations recognize that future success in a globalizing marketplace can only be achieved with a healthy, qualified and motivated workforce. The workplace directly influences the physical, mental, economic and social wellbeing of workers and in turn the health of their families, communities and society. This paper therefore reviewed health promotion activities in the modern workplace taking into cognizance the roles of employers and employees. To create an enabling workplace healthy environment, both the employers and the employees must play their roles. For the employers, provision of health promotion facilities and policies are vital for healthy workforce, while the employees are expected to comply with the guidelines provided by the employers and make good use of the health promotion facilities in the organization.

Keywords: health promotion activities, modern workplace, employers' role, employees' role

1. Introduction

Efforts at promoting health encompassing actions at individual and community levels, health system strengthening, and multi-sectoral partnership can be directed at specific health conditions. Health promotion is more relevant today than ever in addressing public health problems. The workplace can have a positive impact on our physical, mental, economic and social well-being, as well as those of our families. Promoting good health can be in every organization's best interests too. It boosts job satisfaction and morale, improves employee engagement, reduces absenteeism, staff turnover and improves productivity.

Workplace health promotion goes beyond just reducing the incidence of workplace accidents and injuries and Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S), it involves an organizational commitment to improving the health of the workforce,

providing employees with appropriate information, establishing comprehensive communication strategies and involving employees in decision-making processes. For an organization to remain productive, it must pay attention to and maintain the health, job satisfaction and morale of its employees.

Edelman and Kudzma (2017) opined that health promotion goes beyond providing information. It is also proactive decision making at all levels of society as reflected in the healthy people 2020 objectives. The workplace is viewed as an effective setting for health promotion in order to achieve the goal of "Health for All", and for other benefits such as reducing and controlling health care costs as a result of the growing epidemics of communicable and non-communicable diseases. A healthy motivated and contented workforce is fundamental to the future social and economic wellbeing of the nation.

According to Zungu and Setswe (2007), strategies to facilitate workplace health promotion include health education, behaviour-directed prevention, and incorporating the organization's development strategy into human resources policies to make prevention the essential part of the entire corporate strategy. Organizations can have a positive influence on the health of workers by creating healthy work environment, ensuring that organizational policies are conducive to good health, and by providing health promotion programmes and services at work.

2. Concept of Health Promotion

Health promotion is, as stated in the 1986 World Health Organization (WHO) Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. The WHO's 2005 Bangkok Charter for Health Promotion in a Globalized World defines health promotion as "*the process of enabling people to increase control over their health and its determinants, and thereby improve their health*".

Health promotion involves public policy that addresses health determinants such as income, housing, food security, employment, and quality working conditions. Health is, therefore, seen as a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. Therefore, health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy life-styles to well-being, aims at making [political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, behavioural and biological factors] favourable through advocacy for health, focuses on achieving equity in health and demands coordinated action by all concerned: by governments, by health and other social organizations.

2.1 Health Promotion in Workplace

The process of health promotion works in all settings and sectors where people live, work, play and love. A common setting is the workplace. The focus of health on the

workplace is that of prevention and the intervention that reduces the health risks of the employee. The workplace has been established as one of the priority settings for health promotion into the 21st century (Tones & Tilford, 2001; Moy, Sallam, and Wong, 2006; WHO, 2009a). As a setting for health promotion, the workplace deserves special attention, because adults spend more time there than in any other location. The workplace directly influences the physical, mental, economic and social well-being of workers and in turn the health of their families, communities and society. It offers an ideal setting and infrastructure to support the promotion of health of a large audience (Chu, Breucker, Harris, Stitzel, Gan, Gu, and Dwyer, 2000). Therefore, employers are uniquely positioned to influence health for the better by offering workplace health promotion programmes.

Workplace health promotion is defined by the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP) as *“the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work.”* This definition is based on the Luxembourg declaration (1997) developed by the members of ENWHP. In the Luxembourg declaration workplace health promotion (WHP) is described as a modern corporate strategy, which aims at preventing ill health at work (including work-related diseases, accidents, injuries, occupational diseases and stress) and enhancing health-promoting potentials and well-being in the workforce.

According to the Luxembourg declaration this can be achieved through a combination of:

- a) improving the work organization and the working environment,
- b) promoting active participation,
- c) encouraging personal development.

The vision of workplace health promotion places particular emphasis on improving the work organization and working environment, increasing workers' participation in shaping the working environment, and encouraging personal skills and professional development. They are employer-sponsored, organized programmes comprised various services, activities and resources to support employees in practicing health behaviors to reduce health risks, improve well-being, and manage chronic diseases (Berry, Mirabito & Baun, 2010; Steinbrunn, 1988).

In the 1970's, workplace health promotion (WHP) programmes started to emerge as an adjunct to occupational health and safety initiatives. Workers were encouraged to participate in programmes designed to encourage physical activity, healthy eating, and smoke-free living because the health of the employee is very paramount to an organization as it determines the level of functionality of the employee and his ability to go about his duties. Also, it tells us how far the organization can go because the organization relies on the people at work. Workplace health promotion supports a participatory process to help promote a stronger implementation of occupational and environmental health legislation. It suggests tools for maintaining or strengthening national healthy workplace initiatives. To be successful, workplace health promotion has to involve the participation of employees, management and other stakeholders in the

implementation of jointly agreed initiatives and should help employers and employees at all levels to increase control over and improve their health.

2.2 Strategies to Promote Health in the Workplace

Strategies for workplace health promotion need to be inclusive to account for diversity in the workforce. The United States Department of Health and Human Services includes five strategic guidelines for workplace health promotion in its Healthy People 2010 initiative. These include:

- a) Health education, focused on skill development and lifestyle behavior change along with information dissemination and awareness building.
- b) Supportive social and physical environments, reflecting the organization's expectations regarding health behaviors and implementing policies promoting healthy behaviors.
- c) Integration of the worksite programme into the organization's benefits, human resources infrastructure, and environmental health and safety initiatives.
- d) Links between health promotion and related programmes like employee assistance.
- e) Screenings followed by counseling and education on how to best use medical services for necessary follow-up.

More generally, workplace health promotion efforts are implemented at three functional levels, including:

- Level I: awareness programmes such as newsletters, health fairs, and educational classes that may or may not directly improve individual health or influence behavioral change.
- Level II: lifestyle modification programmes of 8 to 12-week duration that are available to employees on an ongoing basis and directly influence health outcomes.
- Level III: the creation of a work environment that assists employees in sustaining healthy lifestyles and behaviors, such as workplace cafeterias offering healthy food choices or the provision of workplace exercise facilities.

In most instances physical activity interventions conform to Level II of this framework and may also include elements from Level III. Incentive-based Fitness Rewards Programmes (FRPs) aim to influence employee behaviors and thereby conform to Level.

2.3 Health Promotion Activities in the Workplace

Health promotion activities in the workplace are outlined as follows:

- a) Work-life balance: providing social support, such as crèche facilities.
- b) Improving and maintaining mental health, for example by, implementing a participative management, accounting for employees' views and opinions; providing stress reduction trainings, relaxation courses, and confidential psychological counselling.

- c) Looking after health: offering regular health checks to monitor blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels.
- d) Physical activity: helping with the cost of physical activities outside work, such as sports or leisure centre memberships; organising sports events within the organisation; encouraging employees to take the stairs rather than using the elevator.
- e) Promoting a healthy lifestyle: offering confidential support and information about alcohol and drugs; promoting information on healthy eating and providing good facilities for turning advice into practice (e.g. providing healthy canteen food and sufficient time to eat it).

2.4 Roles of the Employers and Employees in Workplace Health Promotion

In the workplace setting, both the employers and employee have some roles to play so as to promote health. This is because their combined efforts are needed to improve the health and wellbeing of people at work. Their roles include:

A. The Employer

- a) Promote preventive care by reminding employees to get their flu shots and wash their hands often. Encouraging and even funding vaccinations for employees has one of the clearest returns on investment. When your employees avoid being sick, they avoid missing out on days, if not weeks, of work.
- b) Encourage exercise and taking breaks.
- c) Studies have shown that sitting at a chair for extended periods of time can lead to future health problems. Even on your busiest days, it's important to take a few minutes to step away and regroup. Refresh by going outside and taking a walk around your office building or calm yourself from a hectic day by simply sitting and meditating quietly for a few minutes.
- d) Provide education on the importance of healthy eating and drinking lots of water.
- e) Be mindful of the workers' mental health because unmanaged stress has been linked to heart disease, high blood pressure, and sleep inconsistencies and at the workplace, it can lead to inefficiency, job dissatisfaction, as well as absence from work for related health conditions. If possible, consider offering an assistance programme for employees who have financial troubles, excess stress or depression symptoms. Another idea is educating workers on how to manage stress properly and remembering that maintaining a healthy balance is key.
- f) Ensuring total compliance with the workplace safety laws.
- g) Posting signs that draw attention to safety issues. The types of signs will depend on your business. For example, if employees work with heavy equipment, all machines should have a label warning about potential injuries. You may also want to place signs on doors, reminding employees to close doors behind them to avoid unwanted guests; signs on wet floors; or signs indicating areas of the building that require special safety clothing or items like hats or goggles.

- h) Allowing an occupational health expert to come to your workplace and make health and safety recommendations.
- i) Developing the necessary health programming by teaming up with workplace representatives.
- j) Giving employees medical screenings at work.
- k) Becoming part of health and safety committees.
- l) Distributing health and safety information and protective equipment to your employees regularly.
- m) Hosting events that showcase or educate health and safety practices and more.
- n) Ensuring best practices are being followed in every stage and area of work.
- o) Investing in incentives to encourage participation of employees in healthy lifestyle in the workplace.

B. The Employees

- a) Being aware of their rights for compensation and refusal of unsafe work.
- b) Always wearing relevant protective equipment and taking steps to minimize risk in work areas.
- c) Joining or consulting a health and safety group and discussing workplace issues and concerns.
- d) Taking time to educate and coach co-workers when necessary.
- e) Taking part in medical screenings, workshops or training opportunities that the Labour or unions or employers offer.
- f) Making it a duty to bring the workplace hazards to the attention of employers, co-workers and health and safety committees.
- g) Educate themselves on the contents of the Labour Code.

2.5 Benefits of Workplace Health Promotion

According to WHO, Workplace health promotion is beneficial to the employee and the organization itself. The benefits are as follows:

A. To the organization

- a) Workplace Health Promotion provides a well-managed health and safety programmes.
- b) It creates a positive and caring image for the organization.
- c) It improves staff morale and reduces staff turnover.
- d) It reduces absenteeism and increases productivity
- e) It reduces health care and insurance cost.
- f) It also reduces risks of fines and litigation.

B. To the Employees

- a) Workplace Health Promotion provides a safe and healthy work environment.
- b) It enhances self-esteem and reduces stress.
- c) It improves the employee's morale and increases job satisfaction.
- d) It increases skills for health protection.
- e) It improves health and sense of wellness.

3. Conclusion

Health promotion which according to WHO is the process of enabling people to increase control over their health and its determinants, and thereby improve their health is very essential in every workplace. The workplace is considered to be an important setting for health protection, health promotion and disease prevention programmes because adults spend more time there than in any other location.

The introduction of health promotion in the workplace can reduce health risks and improve the quality of life for workers. Also, maintaining a healthier workforce can lower direct costs such as insurance premiums and worker's compensation claims. It will also positively reduce many indirect costs such as absenteeism and improve workers' productivity. Since Workplace Health Promotion is the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work, the employers can help to improve the health of their employees, create a wellness culture that is employee-centered; provides supportive environments where safety is ensured and health can emerge so as to help bring out the best in their employees.

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