Occupational health nurse as an alternative resource in a small-scale enterprise in Japan

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Conflict of Interest (COI) of the presentation: No potential COI to disclose
Kyoto Industrial Health Association
- Occupational health service provider -

• General and specific health examination for employees by use of mobile units
• Examination of Work environments
• Health guidance
• Occupational health instructions by occupational physicians in enterprises
• Mental health services
• Out-patient clinic
• Health examination for housewives and elderly
• Cancer screening
The situation of occupational health in Japan

• The Industrial Safety and Health (ISH) Law in Japan stipulates that enterprises with 50 or more employees must establish a health committee, appoint an occupational physician (OP), and select health officers from among their employees.

• Moreover large-scale enterprises with 1000 or more employees must appoint a full-time OP.

• OPs in middle-scale and large-scale enterprises usually provide monthly workplace inspections, comments on employees’ work restrictions based on their health examination results, health guidance for employees, and countermeasures against mental health concerns.
The situation of occupational health in Japan 2

• However, small-scale enterprises (SSE) with less than 50 employees do not need to appoint an OP, and occupational health (OH) activities, like health guidance and workplace inspections, are usually not enforced in SSEs.

• To improve this situation, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan established Regional Occupational Health Centers (ROHC). ROHCs are the national OH provider for enterprises with less than 50 employees.
The situation of occupational health in Japan

• There are about 350 ROHCs in Japan. They offer services without any charges. Services include health guidance for employees based on the results of their health examinations, and advice for work environment improvement through worksite visits.

• However, because of shortage of budget of ROHC and time of registered OPs, utilization rate by the enterprises has been quite low for many years.

• Therefore, employees’ OH is generally poorer in SSEs than middle-scale and large-scale enterprises in Japan.
The situation of occupational health in Japan

- OH service organizations like Kyoto Industrial Health Association have been trying to offer various services for SSEs in Japan, such as periodical health examinations, work-environment evaluations, guidance for healthy lifestyles, and clinical services.

- However these trials have not achieved satisfactory outcomes yet.
Situation of OH nurses in Japan

• Hiring an OH nurse is not included in the duty of employers in Japan. However, employers in large-scale and middle-scale enterprises often hire OH nurses. These employers have expectations from OH nurses in the area of management of work-related diseases, health guidance after health examination, and health promotion.

• Experienced OH nurses are not only skillful in their basic domain but also are able to manage work and work environments like OPs, and the salary of OH nurses is generally lower than that of OPs.
Aim

- To improve OH services in SSEs, an OH service organization in Japan recently started placing OH nurses in these enterprises.
- In this presentation, the results of activities of an OH nurse in an SSE are reported.
Methods 1

- In 2012, the employer of Enterprise A with 36 employees requested basic OH support from Kyoto Industrial Health Association. Then one OH nurse began providing monthly basic OH service for this enterprise.
- The OH nurse provided health guidance to employees, and conducted workplace inspections. She also made recommendations to the employer regarding improvements in the work environment based on the results of a health questionnaire survey and the observations through workplace inspection.
Multidisciplinary OH team for an SSE

Enterprise A (36 employees)

Kyoto Industrial Health Association

Health guidance
Workplace inspection
others

Monthly visit

OH nurse

Work environment evaluation experts

Clinical psychologists

Occupational physicians

Others
Methods 2

• At this enterprise, the OH nurse elucidated from the health questionnaire results that the rating for the questionnaire item “full recovery after sleep” was low (34.8%).

• When providing the health guidance to the employees, she also acquired the information that most employees usually stay late at work until 8 or 9 p.m.

• Therefore the OH nurse provided health guidance on proper sleep habits for all employees and informed the employer that this sleep problem was related to overtime work.
Results

• Through the information obtained from the OH nurse, the employer realized that the overtime working conditions for some employees was problematic.

• He decided to hire several part-time workers.
Change in responses to the questionnaire item “full recovery after sleep”

*p < 0.05 by Chi-squares test
Importance of communication with an employer in SSEs 1

- Upon deliberation with the OH nurse, the employer decided to recruit additional workers to reduce overtime work.
- Then sleep habit of the employees improved.
- The employer is the key person in OH activities.
- OH professionals in SSEs may have good opportunities to educate the employer through direct conversations with him/her.

Importance of communication with an employer in SSEs

A sample photo of poor conditions in working with computers acted by the employer.

- The photo was taken to show the effect of the workplace inspection by the OH nurse at the OH committee after the improvement.
- This photo could be a symbol of the good communication between the employer and the OH nurse in this enterprise.
OH nurse activities in other SSEs

• OH in enterprises improved with monthly visit by the OH nurse.
  • Voluntary health consulting increased from 0 (2016) to 4 (2017).
  • Physicians were consulted sooner than previously, regarding the health examination results of each employee.

• Proper cooperation with OP
  • Based on the advice of the OH nurse, the employer arranged an OP consultation with an employee after the sick-leave due to mental health concern.
Limitation of this report

• OH nurse activities were implemented only in a few SSEs.
• Most OH nurse activities were implemented in subsidiary enterprises of large-scale enterprises.
• Effects of OH nurse activities in a wide range of OH level in SSEs are unclear.
Conclusion

• These results suggest that the activities of OH nurses can improve employees’ health conditions in SSEs.
• The communication between employers and OH professionals is important for the development of successful OH activities.
Thank you for your attention!

OH nurses in our Association.

Four OH nurses active in SSEs.