Factors influencing the functions and professional development of the occupational health nurses within selected organizations in the Western Cape

Theresa Margaret Bosman
Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa

Occupational Health Nursing (OHN) is a specialised field of nursing that deals with exposure risks, prevention of disease and disability in the workplace. These nurses work in isolation and are dependent upon regulations to ensure compliance. Although there is very good legislation, there are no quality-control systems in place to ensure that standards of care have been met, or that companies are compliant. They also report to managers who do not have any medical background. This raises a concern, as managers, due to their lack of field-specific knowledge, will not be able to ensure quality of work rendered or adherence to compliance. The lack of insight into the functions and responsibilities of the OHNP poses frustrations when requests for training and attending meetings are made by the Occupational Health Nurses. The purpose of this study is to investigate factors that influence the functions and professional development of Occupational Health Nurses. A mixed-method, descriptive design was used. The target population was an entire group of OHNPs, working in the Western Cape only. Four managers from the private and public sector were also selected to participate in this study. Two data-collection tools were utilised. One was a questionnaire that was distributed to the Occupational Health Nurses and subsequent, telephonic interviews were scheduled with the nurses’ direct line managers. The process was initiated after ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee at Cape Peninsula University of Technology. The quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (V 23). The qualitative data was transcribed by an independent transcriber and descriptive coding was done, after which thematic content analysis was applied. Managers’ responses confirmed the view of 50% of the Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (OHNPs) that they did not understand the functions of the OHNPs. Although the majority of OHNPs work alone, they do not have a locum or an administrator to assist with administrative duties. The majority of OHNPs attend regular development programmes. The respondents indicated that a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) System should be implemented by the South African Nursing Council (SANC).

Biography
Theresa Margaret Bosman holds Diplomas in General Nursing, Midwifery, Community Health Nursing, and Primary Health Care. She completed her B Curr at Unisa in 2001 and Master’s at CPUT in 2015. She has worked in Occupational Health for the past 28 years. She has presented a poster at ICOH in 2009 and Master’s at ICOH in Seoul in 2015.