Occupational Health Services as Universal Service Provision

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ABSTRACT

The present global change affects virtually all people of the world and all aspects of life, most of all the work life. The globalisation of economies, introduction of new technologies, new enterprise structures, new forms of work, new work organizations, demographic changes of the workforce, particularly ageing, growing mobility of working people, new schedules for working hours and high productivity and quality demands set high challenges to safety and health management, safety practices, and for safety and health services. Many of such services are outsourced and often downsized to the minimum. This is paradoxical as the scientific evidence from both the industrialized countries and from developing world show increasing needs for development of occupational safety and health, OSH. Where the risks are the highest and the starting level lowest, there best benefits are found. In spite of such rationale the fragmentation of the work life, however, makes it very difficult to provide full coverage of services to all working people and particularly to those so far underserved.

New innovative approaches in OSH are needed to meet the challenges of the new work life. As the changes are global also the responses need to be generated in a global scale. But the practical implementation always happens at the national and local levels. Effective mechanisms for practical implementation of OSH and particularly occupational health services, OHS, are needed. Most countries of the world do not have basic local level infrastructures for implementation for OHS. The International Commission on Occupational Health, ICOH, has together with the ILO and WHO launched a new concept on Basic Occupational Health Services, BOHS to facilitate the development of local infrastructures and implementation activities. Such services should be available for every workplace and every working individual in the world. Guidelines for the models, infrastructures, practices and work tools are being prepared for that objective in collaboration between the International Organisations.

The principle of universality is widely applied in the provision of socially important services related to the satisfaction of basic needs, and in ensuring citizens’ basic rights. Occupational safety and health constitute an important part of the basic rights of working people. In modern democratic society, basic rights are ensured equally for each and every individual. The principle of equality may be considered as equality within the whole population if it is a question of services needed by each citizen; or within a special sub-population as in the case of occupational health services, which are relevant only for the segment of the population that participates in work life. The ultimate objective of the BOHS initiative is to provide occupational health services for all the world’s working people, regardless of the sector of economy, mode of employment, size of the workplace or geographical location, i.e., according to the principle of universal service provision (USP). The criteria for USP in the case of occupational health services can be defined as follows:

- Accessible to all working people
- Available to all
- Equitable in access and relevant in content with regard to needs
- Effective in provision of health
- Cost-effective in service provision
- Guaranteed by public authority
- Constitute an integrated element of the social policy of work life.

The use of BOHS guidelines needs active training programmes in all parts of the world. Often the local resources are not immediately sufficient for extensive programmes and therefore international collaboration is needed. On the long-term and with the support of good practice guidelines and well-organised services, every Country, and every workplace should be self-sufficient in OHS activities.