

Who's the Patient? Employee or Employer?

Occupational health nurses have a unique role. Our patients are our coworkers. We work hard to develop a trusting relationship with our 'patients', just like other nurses do. We focus on customer service, so our patients will turn to us for their health needs. We use the nursing process on our patients as individuals and as a community.

Now, when I refer to our 'patients' you might think I'm referring to employees. And I am, because we care for employees by providing health advice, immunizations, fit tests, OTC medications, injections and other health needs. But you see, our employees are not our sole focus. Our employers also like to be taken care of. They rely on us to develop timely return-to-work plans for employees who are on medical leave, assist with accommodating employees who have work restrictions, develop medical emergency plans, coordinate safety initiatives, write policies and many other administrative duties.

Occupational health nurses often feel "caught in the middle", trying to meet the needs of employees and employers. But it's a challenge we embrace and we do it well. We are viewed by both as a resource, a confidante, a health expert, a good communicator, a listener, an advocate.....

The next time you see your occupational health nurse, thank him/her for caring about you, whether you are the employee or the employer.

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