



**South African Nursing Council**  
(Under the provisions of the Nursing Act, 2005)

e-mail: [registrar@sanc.co.za](mailto:registrar@sanc.co.za)  
web: [www.sanc.co.za](http://www.sanc.co.za)

P.O. Box 1123, Pretoria, 0001  
Republic of South Africa

Tel: 012 420 1000  
Fax: 012 343 5400

602 Pretorius Street, Arcadia,  
Pretoria, 0083

## COMPETENCIES FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSE SPECIALIST (OHN)

### 1. OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSING

Occupational Health Nursing (OHN) is a specialist field that provides for and delivers health and safety programmes and services to workers and worker populations in their place of employment. It focuses on the promotion and restoration of health, the prevention of illness and injury and the protection from work-related and environmental hazards. OHNs have a sound knowledge and understanding of the risk to which each worker and homogenous worker populations are exposed. Their healthcare expertise is combined with their knowledge of business, which enables them to balance the requirements for a safe and a healthy work environment and the interests of the employees with that of the employer.

As an integral part of the occupational health team, the Occupational Health Nurse focuses on the direct care of healthcare users, as well as assessing and managing common ailments facing the working adult. Their further focus is on programmes aimed at preventing occupational illnesses and injuries, managing disability, assessing and preventing risks, providing consultation with employers and employees as well as providing worker education and training. These focus areas all derive from the overall aims of occupational health, namely creating a healthy and safe working environment and a functional working community; preventing work-related diseases and accidents; and promoting the working ability of individuals and work populations.

Occupational Health Nursing derives its theoretical and conceptual framework from a multidisciplinary base which, amongst others, includes:

- o nursing science;
- o medical science;
- o public health sciences such as epidemiology and environmental health;

- o occupational health sciences such as toxicology, safety, industrial hygiene and ergonomics;
- o social and behavioural sciences; and
- o business management and administration principles.

The plan highlights the following strategic objectives:

- Mapping current situations at national level and the readiness to take action;
- Promoting and supporting the development of a preventive safety and health culture;
- Improving the occupational safety and health conditions in small and medium-sized enterprises as well as in the informal economy; and
- Overcoming shortcomings in the implementation of ratified protocols and conventions.

## **2. CONTEXT (WORK SETTING)**

The premise of Occupational Health Nursing is the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Plan of Action which supports, amongst others, the efforts of the World Health Organisation (WHO) to attain a reduction in the unacceptable levels of human suffering and economic losses caused by work-related accidents and illnesses worldwide.

The Occupational Health Nurse, as part of the occupational healthcare team, is therefore found in work environments that subscribe to the above objectives.

The OHN therefore focuses on the relationship between work, the work environment and the worker's health with an aim of improving, protecting and restoring the health of the worker, thereby influencing the health of the organisation. The focus is on the individual worker/employee, groups of employees and the organisation as a whole.

Central to the OHN's job is the ability to make a judgement call about the worker's suitability to work, based on his health status.

The onsite healthcare facility is the first point of entry into the healthcare system. For vulnerable groups of workers, such as construction workers and temporary employees, this may be the only access to a healthcare service. At this point the

OHN has to make a determination if causation of a disease or illness is occupational in nature. This will allow for the correct referral within the healthcare service for effective healthcare management. Such referrals may be to a family practitioner, community health nurse or various levels of care facilities, depending on the seriousness of the injury or illness.

### 3. OVERLAPS AND COMMONALITIES WITH OTHER SPECIALISATIONS

Commonalities with other specialisations, such as the Community Health Nurse, are found threading through all the domains and subdomains of the framework, but the application and the knowledge base associated with these are different. The OHN's training of the epidemiology of occupational diseases creates an understanding of how causation of the disease may call for a different approach to healthcare and management of the same condition. The OHN has to look at how the disease causation may be related to work exposure and how its management may necessitate an intervention like job relocation. Unlike a Community Health Nurse or a Primary Care Nurse, the Occupational Health Nurse will need to understand how the work environment contributes to or exacerbate the illness as well as how the treatment may influence the worker's ability to safely perform his duties.

### 4. COMPETENCIES

DOMAIN	
SUBDOMAIN/CORE COMPETENCY	SPECIFIC COMPETENCY
<b>DOMAIN 1: PROFESSIONAL, ETHICAL &amp; LEGAL PRACTICE</b>	
<b>1.1 Professional Practice</b>	1.1.1 Practices as an Occupational Health Nursing Practitioner (OHNP) within a team of professionals that includes, but is not limited to the Ergonomist, Hygienist, Occupational Medical Practitioner (OMP), HRM Employee Assistant Programme (EAP) practitioners and safety professionals
	1.1.2 Works collaboratively with other professionals as a leader and member of the occupational health team
	1.1.3 Applies WHO policies and guidelines for healthy workplaces, the ILO conventions with specific reference to those ratified by South Africa, ICOH policies and guidelines for Occupational Health,

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	NIOSH and other international codes of practice as well as those relevant to the profession in general
	1.1.4 Advocates for the employee/healthcare user and employer in the workplace
	1.1.5 Consults with other health professionals in the continuum of care to maintain a multidisciplinary team approach
<b>1.2 Ethical Practice</b>	1.2.1 Uses ethical principles and moral reasoning for decision-making in practice
	1.2.2 Demonstrates competence in dealing with ethical and health rights challenges in own area of practice
	1.2.3 Utilises resources to facilitate ethical decision-making and resolve ethical dilemmas, i.e. NIOH
	1.2.4 Plans and manages healthcare within the occupational health environment to provide care within ethical norms
	1.2.5 Maintains confidentiality of health information in accordance with professional codes, statutes and regulations
	1.2.6 Practises occupational health nursing within the scope of professional ethical norms
<b>1.3 Legal Practice</b>	1.3.1 Identifies legislation and policy guidelines relevant to occupational health nursing
	1.3.2 Analyses and interprets legislation relevant to the workplace to the benefit of the employer and the employee
	1.3.3 Interprets and applies relevant legislative frameworks that govern the promotion of eye health to prevent visual impairment and avoidable blindness, including but not limited to the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (COID Act), Basic Conditions of Employment Act, Labour Act, Mine Health and Safety Act, Occupational Diseases in Mines and Works Act, National Health Act, Nursing Act, Employment Equity Act, Medicines and Related Substances Act to the benefit of both employees and employers

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	1.3.4 Practices within the relevant and appropriate frameworks
	1.3.5 Advocates for the employee in terms of legal and human rights in the workplace
	1.3.6 Ensures compliance with the practice requirements of an OHNP as prescribed in the Occupational Health and Safety Act (and all regulations) and the Road Traffic Act as well as the Mines Health and Safety Act
DOMAIN 2: CLINICAL PRACTICE – CARE PROVISION & MANAGEMENT	
<b>2.1 Health Promotion &amp; Prevention</b>	2.1.1 Uses a primary healthcare strategy for promoting health at all levels of care
	2.1.2 Promotes health communication and health literacy for behaviour change
	2.1.3 Delivers appropriate information to healthcare users in a manner that is sensitive to their conditions and ability to understand
	2.1.4 Designs programmes that support a positive lifestyle and individual efforts to lower the risk of disease and injury
	2.1.5 Leads the implementation of programmes that create an environment that provides balance between work, person and family
	2.1.6 Plans, implements and evaluates health promotion campaigns within a team approach
	2.1.7 Plans, implements and evaluates “right to know training” as prescribed in the Occupational Health and Safety Act
	2.1.8 Advocates for the awareness of employees in terms of workplace health hazards and/or occupational stressors based on the health risk assessment specific to each work environment
	2.1.9 Utilises knowledge of health and wellness to promote health at a group, individual and social level in terms of workplace stressors and hazards
	2.1.10 Supports healthcare users and their families in identifying health risks in their environment and making informed choices about measures to

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	prevent illnesses and promote health
	2.1.11 Prepares employees for retirement
<b>2.2 Assessment</b>	2.2.1 Conducts a health surveillance to identify and evaluate health needs of workers in the workplace
	2.2.2 Conducts a health risk assessment in the workplace to determine workplace stressors and the impact on employees
	2.2.3 Conducts health surveillance based on absorption, metabolism, secretion, dose response and target organ knowledge of specific exposures
	2.2.4 Conducts physical assessments to diagnose common medical conditions and chronic ill health presented at the occupational health facility
	2.2.5 Performs specific screening tests and other identified examinations for the identification of potential occupational diseases and injuries, including but not limited to, audiometry, spirometer, vision screening and biological monitoring
	2.2.6 Identifies and analyses hazards and evaluates their effects on workers and the workplace
	2.2.7 Correlates exposure to workplace health hazards and determines the impact of this on chronic illnesses and special needs of workers
	2.2.8 Compiles/Conducts Occupational Risk Exposure Profiles (OREP) at pre-employment, periodic and exit levels of interventions
	2.2.9 Uses appropriate technology in the comprehensive assessment of healthcare users and their environment effectively
	2.2.10 Determines suitability and fitness for the employment of employees based on the Occupational Risk Exposure Profile (OREP)
	2.2.11 Assesses and monitors clinical interventions to ensure optimum patient safety
<b>2.3 Diagnosis</b>	2.3.1 Utilises data collected during the assessment phase to make a nursing diagnosis related to occupational diseases and hazards

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	2.3.2 Validates the diagnosis with the client and, when appropriate, with other occupational healthcare professionals and other professionals and where legally indicated with the employer, while maintaining confidentiality
	2.3.3 Diagnoses common diseases and occupationally-related illnesses and diseases
	2.3.4 Applies critical thinking skills and creative problem-solving analysis in making clinical decisions
<b>2.4 Care Planning</b>	2.4.1 Develops within a team approach care plans for the worker based on the diagnosis in order to prevent, treat, manage and refer occupational and other diseases
	2.4.2 Utilises the information gathered during the HRA to develop OREPs for homogenous exposure groups
	2.4.3 Designs medical surveillance programmes based on the Health Risk Assessment (HRA) outcomes as prescribed in relevant legislation and policies
	2.4.4 Utilises a scientific approach to collaboratively develop and coordinate mutually agreed upon care plans for individuals and groups
	2.4.5 Plans and develops programmes for groups of workers with special health needs
<b>2.5 Implementation</b>	2.5.1 Applies emergency management at the time of the injury or illness
	2.5.2 Coordinates and manages the care of ill and injured workers
	2.5.3 Manages occupational injuries and diseases in order to minimise residual deficit
	2.5.4 Counsels workers about work-related illnesses and social issues
	2.5.5 Assists and supports ill or injured employees to apply for medical disability/incapacity
<b>2.6 Evaluation</b>	2.6.1 Evaluates responses to and progress after interventions systematically, continually and collaboratively
	2.6.2 Documents responses and the health status of the

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	healthcare user
	2.6.3 Utilises results of reassessment and ongoing evaluation to adapt care planning for individuals or groups of healthcare users
	2.6.4 Utilises statistics to determine trends
<b>2.7 Therapeutic Communication &amp; Relationships</b>	2.7.1 Identifies the need for EAP for the following health related issues: HIV, STI, alcoholism, substance abuse, chronic diseases, psychosocial conditions, shift work, vulnerable groups such as healthcare workers, violence and executive health management
	2.7.2 Advises on and/or refers employees to EAP
	2.7.3 Identifies the need to prepare workers for retirement from a health and financial perspective
	2.7.4 Directs and assists the worker on retirement planning
	2.7.5 Assists and supports employees that are medically boarded
DOMAIN 3: QUALITY OF PRACTICE	
<b>3.1 Quality Improvement</b> Ensures continued delivery of quality OH services	3.1.1 Develops methods of quality assessment in the OH clinic and settings
	3.1.2 Participates in quality management through adhering to recognised Occupational Health norms and standards, including but not limited to, ISO 9000/14001/18001/20001 and other recognised methods of quality assurance
	3.1.3 Utilises recognised audit tools, e.g. OHNP of the Year Audit Tool and Audiometry Audit Tool to conduct a self-audit and/or audit of an approved experiential site
<b>3.2 Continuing Education</b>	3.2.1 Assumes accountability for own professional development to enhance professional growth and maintain competency
	3.2.2 Evaluates continually own practice using professional standards and other quality improvement mechanisms to identify areas of strength as well as areas where development is necessary
	3.2.3 Draws up a plan of action to achieve own

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	competence in areas of identified deficiency
	3.2.4 Participates in continuing professional development sessions and demonstrates an understanding of lifelong learning
	3.2.5 Enhances own competency by continuously updating professional knowledge and skills
	3.2.6 Participates in activities of professional organisation to demonstrate professional responsibility
	3.2.7 Participates actively in professional society activities/meetings to gain up-to-date knowledge relevant to the profession
	3.2.8 Empowers others by training them to perform visual acuity tests and to recognise primary level positions
DOMAIN 4: MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP	
	4.1 Serves as a role model and mentor for others
	4.2 Participates in the planning, implementation and evaluation of disaster management and emergency care programmes in the occupational setting
	4.3 Ensure compliance with Major Hazard Installation Regulations
	4.4 Plans for disaster management within the workplace based on risk based assessments
	4.5 Collaborates with local authorities and emergency services for the planning of effective disaster management and intervention at the workplace
	4.6 Networks and communicates across all levels within an organisation, including but not limited to, worker, labour unions, middle and senior management
	4.7 Utilises principles of human resource, financial and quality management in the management of the occupational health facility
	4.8 Conducts internal and participates in external auditing to assess the quality of service delivery
	4.9 Complies with audit standards such as ISO, SANS and OHSAS and other health and safety management programmes
	4.10 Initiates, develops and implements policies

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	applicable to the occupational health practice
	4.11 Develops or participates in the development of protocol related to pregnancy at work, substance abuse, medical surveillance and chronic health management as determined by the Department of Labour and the Department of Mineral Resources
	4.12 Secures and manages the resources that support occupational health programmes and services
	4.13 Aligns strategically the occupational health programmes and services within the scope of the workplace needs
	4.14 Identifies health needs, hazards and cost associated with securing resources for services
	4.15 Manages the operations of the occupational health programmes and services
	4.16 Participates in decision-making regarding operational and capital resources needed for the cost effectiveness of occupational health programmes and service delivery practices
	4.17 Evaluates the approach to service delivery, the availability of resources, safety, cost and quality
	4.18 Conducts a situational analysis at the workplace as the need arises
	4.19 Coaches and mentors students as well as novice practitioners at the workplace
DOMAIN 5: RESEARCH	
	5.1 Conducts or participates in research to contribute to the scientific knowledge base in occupational and environmental health nursing and advances the profession
	5.2 Identifies research needs and opportunities for the development of occupational health as a specialisation
	5.3 Applies the epidemiological process in the surveillance of occupational diseases and injuries
	5.4 Gathers, analyses, critically reviews and reports a limited range of data and information as applied to

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	the occupational setting
	5.5 Critically reviews occupational health research findings and uses them to improve the practice of occupational nursing
	5.6 Shares and reports research findings elicited from publications, conferences and professional gatherings
	5.7 Uses research findings in the development of occupational policies and procedures

## 5. ACRONYMS AND GLOSSARY

COID	:	Compensation for Occupational Injuries & Diseases
EAP	:	Employee Assistance Programme
ICOH	:	International Code of Occupational Health
ILO	:	International Labour Organisation
NIOH	:	National Institute of Occupational Health
OMP	:	Occupational Medical Practitioner
OHN	:	Occupational Health Nurse
OHNP	:	Occupational Health Nurse Practitioner
OH&SA	:	Occupational Health & Safety Act
OREP	:	Occupational Risk Exposure Profile
WHO	:	World Health Organisation

Occupational Health and Safety Act, Act No. 85 of 1993

Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act, Act No. 130 of 1995

Basic Conditions of Employment Act, Act No. 75 of 1997

Labour Relations Act, Act No. 66 of 1995

Mine Health and Safety Act, Act No. 29 of 1996

Occupational Diseases in Mines and Works Act, Act No. 78 of 1973

National Health Act, Act No. 61 of 2003

Nursing Act, Act No. 33 of 2005

Employment Equity Act, Act No. 55 of 1998

Medicines and Related Substances Act, Act No. 101 of 1965 (as amended)

Road Traffic Act, Act No. 93 of 1996