



# INFORMATION REPORT

<b>TO:</b> Chair and Members of Audit, Finance and Administration Committee	<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b> CITY WIDE
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b> December 10, 2012	
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b> Employee Occupational Health Program (HUR12019) (City Wide)	
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b> Chris Murray, City Manager	<b>PREPARED BY:</b> David Lindeman (905) 546-2424 Ext 5657 Helen Hale Tomasik (905) 546-2424 Ext 4155
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

## Council Direction:

On May 12, 2010, Council approved the addition of 1 FTE Occupational Health Nurse Consultant as a contract for a 3 year pilot period to oversee the City's occupational health programming and to provide disability management support to Human Resources Health, Safety and Wellness Team. At the end of this 3 year pilot period, Council would make a decision as to whether to eliminate or make the position permanent based on the return on investment achieved. This report provides an update on the activities associated with the role of Occupational Health Nurse and the City's occupational health program, and the efficiencies achieved to date. Council also directed staff to report back on budget reductions and savings resulting from this enhancement. As the Occupational Health Nurse did not commence employment until the end of November, 2010, the return on investment report will not be forthcoming until Q3 2013.

## Information:

The Occupational Health Nurse position was established to enhance efforts at managing employee illness and injuries, to reduce the number and length of employee absences, and to fill a number of gaps in our occupational health programming as identified in Report HUR10001.

Reporting to the Manager, Health, Safety & Wellness, the Occupational Health Nurse is responsible for developing and maintaining a comprehensive employee health program including employee health surveillance protocols, co-ordinating access to disability and rehabilitative services, providing health consultation on Long Term Disability (LTD), Short Term Disability (STD) and occupational illnesses and injuries (WSIB absences)

and return-to-work issues, and advising on health, safety and wellness policies and programs.

Occupational health nursing as a discipline provides integrated occupational health and safety services to employers and employees. Occupational health nurses (OHNs) work closely with managers, supervisors and individual employees to maintain, promote and restore employee health, safety and well-being. OHNs are bound by their code of ethics in that they cannot determine eligibility for benefits, i.e., adjudicate claims for sick benefits. They cannot “second guess” the recommendations or diagnosis of a doctor or other medical practitioner.

The Occupational Health Nurse position continues to evolve as elements of our occupational health programming develop. The following improvements have been made to our employee workplace health program as a result of having this expertise on staff:

- **Employee Influenza Immunization** – the flu vaccine program for employees is provided through late fall and has been delivered by the OHN starting in 2011. Previously, the vaccine program was delivered through a contract with an outside agency. In 2011, the OHN completed 32 clinics at various sites vaccinating 1267 employees, volunteers or family members. This was a 68.7% increase in the number of vaccines given from the previous year. The cost per vaccine decreased by \$2.47 by providing this service in-house, versus contracting to a third party provider. The in-house program has resulted in an overall increase in the quality in the delivery of the shots with no re-vaccination required and no issues identified through Public Health Services.
- **Return to Work planning** – for complex or difficult cases, the OHN provides:
  - assistance to Return to Work Services staff in communicating with physicians, specialists or other health care providers.
  - education on or investigation of new medical treatments to help guide recovery and aid in the return to work process
  - recommendations that assist an employee in the return to work process.
  - suggestions on various work accommodations based on employee's abilities.
  - assessment of employee's compliance with substance abuse policy and prevention procedures and completion of any treatment programs
- **Attendance Support Program** – the OHN provides support to managers dealing with employee health issues identified through employee meetings under the program. The OHN also attends meetings when health expertise is required.
- **Medical surveillance** – the OHN has implemented medical surveillance procedures for cholinesterase exposure for those working with pesticides, noise exposure, and drug and alcohol testing (as needed).

- **Wellness screening** – on-site cholesterol testing is offered to employees as part of departmental wellness or other staff events. To date, there have been 234 employees tested. The results are discussed with each employee. Employees with an abnormal result are provided guidance on how to improve their cholesterol numbers and advised to follow up with their physician, if indicated.
- **Health teaching** – health teaching is provided to employees when the OHN joins Return to Work Specialists during work accommodation meetings. The OHN will research conditions and provide feedback to the employee directly or through the RTW Specialist on ways to improve their current health condition or maintain their level of health to prevent further health issues when they are back in the workplace. The OHN helps the employee ensure they are following their healthcare provider’s treatment plan and are taking personal steps to assist with a full recovery.
- **Smoking cessation** – the OHN counsels employees on smoking cessation and supplies information related to cessation aids or outside resources to employees.
- **Program development** – the following programs, policies, procedures, or guidelines have been developed by the OHN and are at various stages of implementation:
  - sharps injury management program to ensure employees who suffer a needle stick injury have immediate access to treatment and follow up healthcare
  - occupational health confidentiality policy to cover the OHN’s activities
  - infection control guidelines that are used throughout the corporation covering personal hygiene, cleaning of the work environment, personal protective equipment e.g. N95 respirators, and client interactions to decrease exposure to infectious disease
  - influenza prophylaxis program for Long Term Care employees to ensure a rapid distribution of treatment to unimmunized staff during a declared influenza outbreak.
  - an influenza immunization policy which promotes employee access to influenza vaccination
- **Report of occupational diseases** – the OHN reviews all City of Hamilton accident reports to determine if reporting to the Ministry of Labour is required, ensuring that legislative requirements are met. This includes outbreak monitoring and reporting to the Ministry of Labour and Workplace Safety and Insurance Board.
- **Committees:** the OHN participates on the following City committees:
  - Occupational Health and Safety Advisory,
  - Healthy Workplace Advisory,
  - Bed Bug Action Group,
  - Crisis Intervention Peer Support team,
  - Occupational Health Exposure Program with Fire Services.

- **Record keeping:** the OHN has implemented an electronic employee health record keeping system. This system centralizes employee health records with the Occupational Health Nurse acting as a Health Information Custodian under the *Personal Health Information Protection Act*. This system ensures that employee health information remains private and secure and is not stored in individual departments.

Efficiencies Realized to Date within Human Resources as a result of OHN position

- Budget reductions have been realized in Human Resources in the areas of consulting fees, contractual services and medical costs for an annual savings of \$18,900 (based on 2013 draft budget).
- Having the OHN deliver the employee influenza vaccination program resulted in annual savings of \$3,127 (based on 2011 results)
- Freed up time for RTW Services staff to be able to deliver training on disability management and attendance management, and implement new policies and administrative procedures for the Attendance Support Program

Employee absenteeism rates are starting to turn around with enhanced attention to disability management and attendance management by Human Resources and management across the organization. While the reduction in paid sick days cannot be attributed solely to the Occupational Health Nurse, the services provided by the OHN are critical to the comprehensive approach that the Health, Safety and Wellness team is able to implement to keep our employees healthy and safe at work.