

# Occupational Health Nursing. Education and Practice in the EU countries.

Education Group, FOHNEU

## FINAL REPORT

This report is based on data collected by the questionnaire designed by the education group and revised during the Lille meeting in 2004. For two countries (Germany and Ireland), data is based on the first version of the questionnaire. For the rest, data is based on the revised version. For most of the countries data provided by both questionnaires was identical. For a few countries there were small discrepancies between the two questionnaires; in that case the revised questionnaire data were used. Table 1 shows the countries that provided data.

**Table 1. Countries included in the report**

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>OLD Q</b>	<b>NEW Q</b>
1. Belgium (BE),		✓
2. Cyprus (CY),		✓
3. Denmark (DK),		✓
4. Finland (FI),		✓
5. France (FR)		✓
6. Germany (GE),	✓	
7. Greece (GR),		✓
8. Ireland (IR),	✓	
9. Italy (IT)		✓
10. Netherlands (NL),		✓
11. Portugal (PT),		✓
12. Spain (SP),		✓
13. Sweden (SWE),		✓
14. Switzerland (SWI),		✓
15. UK		✓

The questionnaire is divided into three parts a) general nursing education, b) occupational health nursing education and c) occupational health nursing practice and in its present form is included as an annex. Data collected is presented in the same order.

A-

### General Nursing Education and Training.

In most countries nurse education is organised by the Ministry of Education. In Cyprus, Germany and Spain responsibility lies with the Ministry of Health, in the UK the Nursing and Midwifery Statutory Body set and monitors standards, while there are countries where professional organisations or voluntary sector organisations also have responsibility for the General Nursing Education and Training. In Switzerland responsibility lies with the OFFT (Office fédéral de la formation et de la technologie and the Conférence des directeurs des affaires sanitaires) which depends on the Economic Department.

Nursing education in Europe is still diverse and although professional titles that are awarded are according to the EU directives, the institutions that award the titles as well as the duration of the studies differ from country to country as well as within each country occasionally.

In the following table (2) the duration of the studies by country and type of institution that awards the nursing title are presented.

**Table 2. Type of Institution that provides basic nursing education and awards the title “Nurse”.**

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>University (length of course)</b>	<b>HE/College/ Polytechnic (length of course)</b>	<b>Secondary/ technical (length of course)</b>
Belgium		3	
Cyprus		3,25	
Denmark		3,5	
Finland		4	
France	3,5		
Germany	5		3
Greece	4	4	2-3
Ireland	4		
Italy	3+2		
Netherlands		4	
Portugal		4	
Spain	3		
Sweden	3		
Switzerland		4	
United Kingdom	4	3	

### ***B- Occupational Health Nursing Education and Training.***

Although occupational health is considered a specialised field it was thought appropriate to investigate how the subject is taught in the nursing curricula. As it was found out

occupational health is included as a full course in Greece, Italy, Portugal and depending on the school in Belgium. It is incorporated in community health courses in Switzerland and in some schools in the UK.

Ten countries have specialization programmes of variable duration but generally at postgraduate level and these programmes are presented in table 3. In Italy occupational health is no longer a specialization for nurses, but a separate professional activity studied at university for 3 years that leads to the title of “*Techniche della prevenzione nell’ambiente e nei luoghi di lavoro*”. In the Flemish community of Belgium, in Cyprus, Greece and Portugal, occupational health is included in postgraduate courses –either specialization of MSc programmes of at least one-year duration - in community health nursing. As a general prerequisite only registered nurses can apply for a specialization course, but in some countries there could be additional requirements. In Finland only public health nurses can specialise, while experience is also required. Experience is also a requirement in Denmark, Germany and Switzerland.

**Table 3. Specialisation programme/-es in Occupational Health Nursing.**

	Year OHN programmes first established	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Theory</u>	<u>Practice</u>	<u>Units</u>
Belgium, Flemish community	1999	p/t diploma	40 weeks			
Denmark	1998	p/t diploma	1 year	440 hours	Varies with individual choice of project	Aligned to 120 CATS Level 2 (UK)
Finland	1968	p/t certificate	19-20 weeks		2-4 weeks	30 ECTS
France	1994	p/t diploma	15-16 months	646 hours		60 ECTS
Germany	1979	p/t certificate	8 w	260 hours	20 hours	
Netherlands	1990	f/t degree	2 years	3360 hours		120 ECTS
Spain		f/t degree	9 months	300	50	
Sweden		p/t diploma	2 years	13 weeks	27 weeks	60 ECTS
Switzerland	2000	p/t diploma	18 weeks during 2 years	750 hours	750 hours	50 ECTS
UK 1	1934	F/t Certificate p/t Certificate	6 months 12 months	50%	50%	
UK 2	1986	F/t Diploma P/t Diploma	12 months 2 years	50%	50%	120 CATS level 2
UK 2	1994	F/t degree P/t degree	12 months 2 years	50%	50%	120 CATS level 3

The content of the specialised education had differences from country to country, but in all programmes there were subjects related to “Health Promotion and Education”, “Prevention

Policies at the workplace”, “Occupational Epidemiology” and “Environmental surveillance and health protection”. The subjects taught in each country are presented in table 4.

**Table 4: Subjects that are included in the specialisation programme.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Health promotion and health education	BE(FI) DK FI FR GE NL SWE SWI SP UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Prevention policies at the workplace	BE(FI) DK FI FR GE NL SWE SWI SP UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Occupational Epidemiology	BE(FI) DK FI FR GE NL SWE SWI SP UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental surveillance and health protection	BE(FI) DK FI FR GE NL SWE SWI SP UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Health assessment and surveillance	BE(FI) DK FI FR NL SWE SWI SP UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Organisation and Administration of OH Services	BE(FI) DK FI FR GE NL SWI SP UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Emergency care in the workplace	BE(FI) FI FR GE SP UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Research methods	DK FR NL SWI UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Health and safety legislation	DK FR NL SWI UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Occupational psychology	FR NL SWI UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Counselling & communication skills	FR NL SWI UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Ergonomics	DK FR SWI UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Management skills	DK SWI UK
<input type="checkbox"/> Sociology	FR SWI UK

Most countries declared that they have changes planned in OHN education, although not clearly stated in all cases as it is presented below:

- Germany according to new legislation, not clear.
- Ireland OHN are trying to set up a post-graduate specialist course.
- Netherlands is discussing the OH core competencies and the role of the adviser.
- Portugal is trying to re-establish specialised education.
- Spain and but not clear.
- Switzerland to improve sociology and psychology and mental health at work.
- UK as a result of registration as a specialist practitioner in community public health nursing.

### ***C- Occupational Health Nursing practice.***

Occupational health and safety is considered a worker’s right by EU legislation. However, there is not a legal requirement for the organisation of Occupational Health Services in all countries as it was found out. In fact in only a few countries this is obligatory, such as in Belgium (in both communities), Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Netherlands and Portugal. In the rest OH services are organised on a voluntary basis, although in these countries OH has a tradition and, therefore, they have traditionally had an OH N service.

OH services are widely available for employees in the public and private sector. Similarly only a few countries oblige the employer to hire an OHN such as Belgium (Flemish community), Finland, France and Portugal. In some other countries there is also a requirement to hire a nurse to provide first aid. See data below:

- ❑ Belgium-Flemish community only for first aid – 500 employees
- ❑ France – 200 in industry, 500 in tertiary
- ❑ Germany only for first aid - 1500
- ❑ Greece only for first aid – 100 (not necessarily a nurse, could be a trained first aider or assistant nurse, provided there is a coverage by a physician)
- ❑ Portugal – 200

Despite that occupational health is organised in different ways in EU countries, OHN could be employed in an Occupational Health Service in all countries that provided data. In some of these countries there are special qualifications or other requirements for the employment of a nurse in an Occupational Health Service, such as relevant qualifications and experience in Finland, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland. In most countries it is also possible for an OHN to lead/be in charge of an Occupational Health Service, such as in Belgium (French community), Cyprus (there is only one at present), Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, UK. The duties that an OHN could carry out in each country are presented in table 5.

**Table 5: The main duties that a nurse is called to carry out in an Occupational Health Service.**

Health education/promotion	BE(FI) BE(Fr) DK FI FR GE GR IR NL PT SP SWE SWI UK
Disease and injury prevention	BE(FI) BE(Fr) DK FI FR GR IR NL PT SP SWE SWI UK
First aid services	BE(FI) BE(Fr) FI FR GE GR IR NL PT SP SWE SWI UK
Administrative duties in the service	BE(FI) BE(Fr) DK FI FR GE GR IR NL PT SP SWI UK
Health assessment and surveillance	BE(FI) BE(Fr) DK FI FR GR IR NL PT SP SWE SWI UK
Rehabilitation/resettlement	BE(FI) DK FI FR IR NL PT SWI SWE UK
Sickness absence management & advice	FI DK FR IR NL PT SP SWI UK
Epidemiological surveys	DK FI FR GR NL PT SWI UK
Risk assessment & safety	DK FR GR IR NL PT SWI UK
Environmental surveys/controls	BE(FI) FI FR GR IR NL UK
OH training e.g. Skin care, Hearing conservation, Stress management	DK FR GR NL SWI UK
OH service management	DK GR PT SWI UK
Students' tutoring	FR GR PT SWI UK

Ergonomics	FR IR NL SWI UK
Case management	DK IR NL SWI UK
Employee assistance programmes	FR IR NL SWI
Counselling & teaching	FR GR PT UK
Critical incidence	IR SWI
Physician's assistant	FR GE

Special Wages Agreement for Occupational Health Nurses exist in Denmark, Finland, Ireland (in health sector), Spain, and in the UK there are in place recommendations from the professional body the RCN. Special Employment Conditions e.g. allowances, pension, car, mobile phone, etc. for Occupational Health Nurses exist or could be negotiated in Finland, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the UK.

Continuing education is required for all nurses in Finland, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK. Continuing education programmes for OHNs exist in Belgium (Flemish community), Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.

Professional associations are organised in 12 countries and in some of them more than one. Relevant professional journals or newsletters are published in 9 countries. Detailed data of associations and journals per country are presented in the annex.

Finally in the following table Occupational Health Nurses are presented in numbers. The average working population in the EU – which equals to 62,6% - was used to estimate the proportion of OHNs per workers in each country.

**Table 6: OHNs in numbers in the EU countries.**

Country	No of OHNs working in OH	with OHN qualification	members of the professional body	OHN/workers
Belgium	800		BFr=152, BF1=250-300	8.450
Cyprus	1			500.000
Denmark	100	60	80	35.000
Finland	2500	2250	2300	1.350
France	5000	50	475	7.865
Germany	10000			5.380
Greece	100	4		71.500
Ireland	200			13.500
Netherlands	1200	800	400	8.800

Portugal	600-700	300	70	10.450
Spain	5.000	11.000	298	5.600
Sweden	1500	700	1200	3.900
Switzerland	80	13	60	58.500
United Kingdom	5000		3500	7.800

In conclusion, OHN practice is widespread in the EU, but education in some countries is not yet developed to meet contemporary demands of OHN practice. The development of postgraduate specialisation programmes based on the Core Curriculum that has been developed and published by FOHNEU is now in progress by the EU financed project <sup>1</sup>(HOHNEU) to harmonise OHN education at Master degree level.

Finally, it should be noted that data presented in this report are a picture of the situation in countries at the time that the questionnaire was completed. Therefore, current situation could be a little different. It is in the intention of the FOHNEU education group to repeat this survey from time to time in order to report the most current data and the changes that happen over time.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://Isd.uni-mb.si/hohneu/>