Health Workers’ Experiences and Needs around Occupational Health Services in Cape Town, South Africa

The participants in this project came from the following public health sector trade unions:
- Denosa
- Hospersa
- Nupsaw
- Pawusa
- Sadnu
- Samwu

Research findings on Occupational Health Services

- There is a range of procedures and role players that make up the system of OH services, but this system does not function effectively, and certainly not in the interests of health workers.
- As a result, health workers do not get proper diagnosis, treatment or management for workplace injury and illness.
- Employer opposition to workers’ health and safety rights, their negligence, disinterest and obstructionism is an important factor in blocking health workers’ access to an effective OH service.
- Health workers’ experiences of medical practitioners not complying with proper diagnostic and reporting procedures encourage them to see these services working in the interests of management.
- Employers are not using workplace injury or illness information and stats to develop preventive approaches.

A dysfunctional OH service for health workers means that:

- Cases are not recognized or they are neglected, causing huge physiological, psychological, emotional, and social hardship on affected health workers.
- Occupational injuries and diseases are left as isolated individual problems and are not seen as collective issues. As a result workers are often stigmatized.

These participatory learning and research projects are an important tool for stimulating and facilitating learning inside trade unions.

As health workers we must equip ourselves and our trade unions!

Workers are really not aware of hazards or health and safety rights at the workplace. They only become aware when they get injured or become ill. Trade unions are not paying proper attention to health and safety and shop stewards don’t have a clue. The unions are also not putting pressure on the employer to comply with the General Admin Regulations regarding the election of health and safety reps. We must take steps to change this. We must make shop stewards aware of health and safety issues. We must encourage our unions to network and collaborate so that each one is not reinventing the wheel. We must also make sure our unions to ensure election of health and safety reps and enforce our rights to access to health and safety information in our workplaces.

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