

Raising Our voice, Breaking Our Silence

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

A Participatory, Reflection and Action project



facilitated by the Industrial Health Research Group (IHRG) with support from the Regional Network for Equity in Health in East and Southern Africa



(EQUINET) and IDRC Research Matters, June 2006

The participants in this project came from the following public health sector trade unions:

Denosa
Hospersa
Nupsaw
Pawusa
Sadnu
Samwu

“Here we are allowed to participate. We come with our experiences from our workplaces. By coming here we can get a distance from it and see its reflection. With participation we come up with action. The resolutions or answers that we come up with are actually based on the link between the health and well-being of health workers and the quality of health care that they are able to provide to the community needs to be recognized and positively developed.”



In this PRA project, participants carried out investigations of occupational injuries and illnesses in their workplaces. This allowed them to use their own real experience of case work as the material for reflection, learning,



The link between the health and well-being of health workers and the quality of health care that they are able to provide to the community needs to be recognized and positively developed.

- 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:

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 get our unions to ensure election of health and safety reps and enforce our rights to access to health and safety information in our workplaces.

It is important to sustain these networking and learning activities in order to contribute to that organizational development.

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