

New Jersey State
Association
of
Occupational Health
Nurses
NJSAOHN

80th Anniversary

1929 - 2009



New Jersey State Association of Occupational Health Nurses, Inc.

EDUCATE **PROMOTE** **ENCOURAGE**

www.njsaohn.org

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In preparing this historical resume of the first 80 years of NJSAOHN'S activities, I am grateful to the work of those who came before me and compiled historical resumes for the 35th and 50th anniversary years. In 1964, Gertrude Muller Hopler, R.N., wrote the original history and Lucrezia Winne, R.N., updated it in 1979.

I have searched available records and I welcome corrections of any inaccuracies or omissions which may be used in future revisions. It is impossible to write every item of information that has occurred over time, but I hope this historical resume highlights some of the major milestones and achievements of this association.

Patricia Emanuele, R.N., MSN, COHN-S

NJSAOHN Spotlights 80 Year History

2009 marks the 80th anniversary of the New Jersey State Association of Occupational Health Nurses (NJSAOHN), a professional nursing organization dedicated to advancing the health, safety and productivity of workers. This occasion provides an opportunity for a brief look at the past and how the NJSAOHN evolved along with changes in the working sectors and advances in health and medicine.

1929 was a momentous year in history; Herbert Hoover was elected President, Jacqueline Kennedy, Anne Frank, and Martin Luther King were born, the Atlantic City Convention Center opened, Penicillin was discovered, and it was the start of the Great Depression (1929-1939). New Jersey was highly industrialized and factories employed nurses to prevent the spread of infectious disease, to address health-related problems resulting from labor shortages during World War I, and to cut costs rising from job-related illnesses and injuries. Workers' Compensation and accident prevention became a part of plant policies and the nurses often made home visits to sick or injured employees. At this time, a few nurses employed in industrial plants in the Newark area met and formed the New Jersey Industrial Nurses Club (NJINC) to discuss the special problems of the industrial nurse. Charter members of the club were Jennie Bauer, R.N., Frances Fowler, R.N., Edna Gardell, R.N., and Emma Hahn, R.N.; Mrs. Bauer was the club's first president and served for eight years.

There were 22 members in 1935 and the formative years were spent developing bylaws, recruiting members, planning meetings, writing newsletters, and raising operating funds. Membership dues in the early days were \$1 and periodic "Quilt Raffles" and monthly "Dark Horse Shares" supplemented the budget. In 1938, the club became known

as the New Jersey Industrial Nurse Association (NJINA) and incorporated in 1940.

Growing membership called for the creation of a Southern branch in 1939. Industrial nurses from other states held joint meetings with NJINA which led to the creation of a national organization in 1942 called the American Association of Industrial Nurses, currently known as the American Association of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN).

In 1945, NJINA had 140 members. At this time, the country was emerging from the Depression years and facing World War II, reviving NJ industries such as textiles, ship building, air craft manufacturing and munitions. Chemical and pharmaceutical companies were thriving. After the war, older manufacturing industries began to decline while jobs in research, insurance, healthcare, educational facilities and the service sector increased.

In 1943, Rutgers Extension Division offered a course for industrial nurses. This three-month course was offered in Newark and Camden-two major industrial cities at the time. The course was attended by 187 members. In 1945, the fifteenth anniversary of NJINA was celebrated at the Military Park Hotel in Newark with an afternoon conference followed by a banquet in the evening and representatives from 75 industries attended.

A Central branch was established in 1946. One of their fundraisers included a fashion show at the Arnold Constable store in Trenton where many members served as models; tickets cost \$1. State membership reached 188 and in 1949 NJINA hosted a conference with the New York and Philadelphia Industrial Nurses Associations. The conference theme was "Advancement of Education of the Nurse in Industry". For the first time, plant tours were included in conference activities.

In the 1950's, many companies paid for their nurses to be members of NJINA. Nurses were encouraged to attend conferences which were often held on Saturdays. The organization established a job placement service and their newsletters during this time provided business information and mentioned who was ill, who died, who married and often included poetry. Community service was promoted and many of the nurses gave time to local ambulance squads, Girl Scouts and blood mobiles. The association collected items for charities and donated gifts to the needy, usable uniforms to nurses in poor countries and donated books to local hospitals. A scholarship fund was established for nursing school students and members were encouraged to write articles and seek advertisers for the national professional publication, currently called the AAOHN Journal.

In 1957, a reorganization of the NJINA occurred and the founder group became the Northern branch. The Northern, Central and Southern branches held monthly meetings and invited guest speakers during the 1960's. December meetings were usually holiday parties and members came with gifts to be donated to childrens' homes and homes for the aged. Annual meetings were often held in conjunction with doctors and other healthcare professionals.

A name change occurred in 1960; the group was now called the New Jersey State Association of Industrial Nurses (NJSAIN). There was much focus on continuing education and efforts to make industrial nursing into a specialty. Nurses were encouraged to wear white uniforms, white hose, shoes and caps and were addressed as "Miss" or "Mrs." A 1961 wage survey conducted listed that members were paid \$95 for a 40 hour work week. In 1962, President Kennedy invited the association to attend The President's Conference on Occupational Safety; 4 members attended.

Increased membership, now totaling 378 in 1963, required the formation of another branch. The Lakeland branch was added in the northern section of the state and was quickly followed by yet another branch, the Palisades branch in 1964. Members in this branch came from the Bergen county area. The branches met for annual meetings and rotated the hosting of these meetings. An educational fund was established to assist local branches to promote educational opportunities in their respective areas. Members were interested in dispensing medications and audiometric screening; drug addiction and occupational hearing loss were major issues during this time. In 1965, the newsletter was named "*The Beacon*" and continued to be printed until the late 1990's. One of the members, Gertrude Muller Hopley, R.N., took it upon herself to serve as the historian for the organization, a task she undertook until 1973.

The 1970's ushered in many programs on the topics of stress and the expanded role of the nurse. The AAOHN established a written national exam and requirements for becoming a certified occupational health nurse or "COHN". Members who worked in industry for fifteen or more years qualified for certification by the grandfather clause. The COHN was required to renew his/her certification every five years, showing evidence of 75 hours of continuing education. The letter "S" added to the COHN signifies that the nurse holds a bachelor's degree. Monthly branch meetings helped to meet educational requirements with programs that now needed to be reviewed, approved and awarded educational credits.

Occupational Health Laws (OSHA) came into being during the 1970's and changes in record keeping, blood banking, and hepatitis were main concerns. OSHA requires a reporting and recording system to monitor job related injuries and illnesses and occupational health nurses still have a major role in this area.

Many companies continued to support the occupational health nurses; for example, Exxon contributed money to the organization and the Schering pharmaceutical company provided occupational health nurse awards in the 1970's and 1980's in recognition for outstanding service. Many meetings were held at Schering, located in Kenilworth. There were also raffles and sales of candy and jewelry to raise funds for the organization.

Another name change occurred in 1977; the organization became the New Jersey Association of Occupational Health Nurses. *The Beacon* was published three times a year and included reporting on highlights from conferences, advances in health and legislative activities. Several members were active on the State Safety Council, the National Institute to Prevent Blindness, the NJ Coalition of Nursing Organizations, and the Rutgers Advisory Board for Masters Programs. A sixth branch was established in 1976: the Tri-County Branch which consisted of Middlesex, Morris and Somerset counties.

Throughout the 1980's, nurses were encouraged to support state and national meetings. Service and knowledge based industries began replacing plants and factories throughout the state. There were 510 members in 1982 and in 1983, an alphabetical listing of the membership was entered into a state computer for the first time. Nursing leadership, ergonomics, stress, educational advancement, case management, health promotion and disease prevention were popular lecture topics.

The American with Disabilities Act of 1990 and challenges with OSHA reforms for ergonomics, air quality, and blood borne pathogens required the assistance of the occupational health nurse to improve compliance. Branches held meetings less frequently in the 1990's and *The Beacon* was published twice a year. Advance directives, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and health screenings were

popular topics. In 1999, Gail Buckler, R.N., developed the organization's first website: *WWW.NJSAOHN.ORG*.

A re-organization occurred in 2001; the six branches dissolved and three regions were formed along county lines. The county regions are: Region 1-Essex, Hudson, Bergen, Passaic, Morris, Sussex and Warren; Region II-Union, Hunterdon, Somerset, Middlesex, Monmouth and Mercer; Region III-Ocean, Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Atlantic, Salem, Cumberland, and Cape May.

In 2005, New Jersey mandated continuing education for all nurses: 30 hours every two years. The now named New Jersey State Association of Occupational Health Nurses (NJSAOHN) requests each region to plan three continuing education programs per year to help meet this educational requirement and an annual state meeting also provides education credits. The AAOHN, the national professional association for occupational and now "environmental" health nurses is currently considering a new name for the association. NJSAOHN is one of AAOHN's 100 chapters, and in 2007 received "Chapter of the Year" award.

In 2008, membership totaled 261. New designs were developed for the website and its logo; "*to educate, promote and encourage occupational health nurses*". At present, the NJSAOHN mission is to assist members to attain the highest level of professional expertise, provide networking, mentoring and educational opportunities, promote and support occupational health research and encourage active participation in governmental and legal issues. There is no newsletter, the Board of Directors meets four times a year (usually at a restaurant in central Jersey), and the organization hosts a conference for the Northeast Regional States Association of Occupational Health Nurses (NEAOHN) every 10 years. Over ninety percent of the membership has an electronic mailing address which facilitates communication and saves the costs of printing and postage.

In 2009, the role of the occupational health nurse varies from clinician to education; case manager to director and consultant. Occupational health nurses remain the largest group of healthcare providers serving the worksite where manufacturing plants have been supplanted by the growth of the service sector and knowledge based companies. Economic times, outsourcing of personnel, and decreased company budgets contribute to why NJSAOHN membership has declined over the years. Current issues facing NJSAOHN and nursing in general include entry-level educational requirements for registered nurses, non-patient specific standing orders, and a multi-state Nurse Compact Act that would allow nurses to practice in other states that adopt the legislation.

Today, all the people mentioned earlier who were born in 1929 are deceased. A new Atlantic City Convention Center opened in 1997, Barack Obama is elected President, and many germs have become resistant to Penicillin. Once again in history our stock market is down and the nation is in a Recession. 80 years ago our founders faced a Depression and yet they unselfishly gave of their talents, energy and passion to accomplish several important milestones and built a vibrant organization which today offers networking, educational and other opportunities to meet with professional peers.

NJSAOHN will celebrate its 100th anniversary in twenty years. It embraces the challenges and opportunities ahead to benefit its members and the employees and businesses it serves, for today's efforts are history in the making.