Establishing Occupational Disease and Injury Services in Taiwan

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Abstract

Because of severe under-diagnosis and under-notification of occupational diseases and lack of assistance systems of rehabilitation and return to work on workers with occupational injuries, Centers for Occupational Disease and Injury Service (CODIS) has been established since 2003. In 2009, there were nine CODISs to provide the services, including 3 centers in northern, 3 in central, 2 in southern, and 1 in eastern Taiwan. A coordination center, Center for Occupational Disease and Injury Management and Service (CODIMS), was established in 2007 in Taipei, to ensure the standard operating procedures and the quality of services. In addition, the network hospitals, which collaborated with their regional Centers for Occupational Disease and Injury Service, joined the system to provide the services. Therefore, the network for occupational disease and injury services was built with 150 outpatient services per week by the end of 2009. The main tasks of CODIMS are to provide the professional consultation on the management of occupational disease and injury, to establish the standard operation procedures for CODISs’ services, to ensure the quality of CODISs’ services, and to maintain the reporting system of occupational diseases and injuries.

The number of reported occupational diseases has been increased significantly, especially in the period of 2006-2008. The compensable cases of occupational diseases were also increased in same period. The experience of the establishment of Centers for Occupational Disease and Injury Services and the network hospitals is an effective approach. Future work are to provide the more basic occupational health services under the implementation of national occupational health service program, to extend the notification of occupational diseases and injuries, to notification of work-related diseases, to improve the quality of services, etc.

Keywords: Occupational disease and injury services, Notification, Occupational health service

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Background and Objective

Work in Taiwan have gone through major changes from coal and gold-copper mining since the early twentieth century to agriculture in the 1950s to 1960s, and to manufacturing, commerce, and service since the 1970s as a result of industrial modernization. Currently service industries employ the most workers. The lack of knowledge or recognition of occupational hazards, poorly implemented industrial hygiene measures, and the lack of pre-employment and periodic health monitoring have resulted in many occupational injuries and diseases. However, diagnosis and recognition of occupational diseases had been relatively lacking due to poor training in physicians regarding this cause of diseases, poor availability of services on occupational medicine, and lacking of knowledge about occupational health in employees and employers [1]. In 2003, the system of occupational disease and injury services was launched, and the first center for Center of Occupational Disease and Injury Service (CODIS) was established. In 2007, a coordination center, Center of occupational Disease and Injury Management and Service (CODIMS), was also established [2]. The paper is to review the change after the implementation of the system.

Before the Establishment of Occupational Disease and Injury Services

Before the year of 2000, diagnosis and notification of occupational diseases were limited, despite a general understanding that occupational safety and health was not perfect in all industries, especially in small-scales enterprises and workplaces. In addition, occupational injuries were under-reported. Although Labor Safety and Health Act mandates that the employers report the accident involving one death or injuries to three or more workers to the appropriate governmental authority within 24 hours, other accidents are not reported by employers despite any severity [2]. In addition, until now, the Act or Regulation in Taiwan does not mandate that the physician diagnosing occupational diseases is required to report them to the government. In 1995, the Department of Health established the reporting system of occupational diseases, and physicians could report the occupational disease voluntarily. In the period, only limited occupational medicine physicians would report. Before 2007, the average number of the annual compensable workers with occupational diseases by National Labor Insurance in Taiwan was about two to three hundred [3], which was relatively low as compared with other countries.

The Process of Establishment of Occupational Disease and Injury Services

In 2003, the first center for CODIS was established, followed by four more centers between 2003 and 2005. From 2006 to 2008, Council of Labor Affairs put more efforts to establish more extensive infrastructure for CODIS in northern, central, southern, and
eastern Taiwan, to provide accessible and sophisticated services on occupational health care. In addition, a coordination center, CODIMS, to ensure the standard operating procedures and the quality of services was established in 2007. In 2009, there were nine CODISs to provide the services, including three centers in northern, three in central, two in southern, and one in eastern Taiwan. Furthermore, each CODIS collaborates with surrounding hospitals to develop a network for occupational disease and injury services. By the end of 2009, 44 network hospitals were established (Figure 1).

The CODISs and network hospitals provide occupational health services, including diagnosing and preventing occupational diseases or injuries, occupational rehabilitation or return-to-work, and insurance compensation assistant. Besides the outpatient services, each center also provides walk-through investigation, risk or hazard assessment to evaluate the occupational exposure, and health management or health promotion for enterprises. From 2002 to 2009, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of weekly outpatient services at all CODISs and network hospitals, which were 150 by the end of 2009 (Figure 2). From 2003 to 2005, Bureau of Labor Insurance, Council of Labor Affairs subsidized the other three to four medical centers to establish CODISs. After 2006, in order to extend the services to each area as well as establishing the infrastructure, Department of Labor Safety and Health, Council of Labor Affairs overall planned all CODISs and there were nine CODISs to provide the services by the end of 2009.
The Outcome of Establishing Occupational Disease and Injury Services

The main tasks of CODIMS are to provide the professional consultation on the management of occupational disease and injury, to establish the standard operation procedures for CODISs’ services, to ensure the quality of CODISs’ services, to investigate the clusters of occupational diseases, to develop the strategy for the prevention of occupational diseases or injuries, and to maintain the reporting system of occupational diseases and injuries. The reporting system of occupational diseases and injuries was formally launched in September 2007, which was based on the principle of previous reporting system at Department of Health. The number of reporting occupational diseases has been increased significantly, especially in the period of 2006-2008, and the number was up to 1,643 cases in 2008 and 1,349 cases in 2009 (Figure 3). The top three frequent occupational diseases, according to the reporting system from September 2007 to December 2009, are hearing loss, musculoskeletal disorders, and neurologic disorders (Figure 4)[4].

Figure 2 The number of weekly outpatient services providing occupational disease and injury services from 2003 to 2009.

Figure 3 The number of reporting occupational diseases in the network for occupational disease and injury services in Taiwan from 2003 to 2009.
Figure 4  The classification of occupational diseases according to the reporting system from September 2007 to December 2009.

The annual number of compensable cases with occupational diseases by the Bureau of Labor Insurance has shown an increasing trend from 2005 to 2009 (Figure 5)[3], and the CODISs and network hospitals also reported more occupational diseases in the period. Thus, the system of the network for occupational disease and injury services may have some contribution on the number of compensable cases.

Figure 5  Annual number of compensable cases with occupational diseases by the Bureau of Labor Insurance from 2005 to 2009 (including the cases of disability or death).
In 2009, the CODIMS and nine CODISs started to provide basic occupational health services to small-scaled enterprise with less than 300 employees. The services follow the principle of basic occupational health services, proposed by ILO/WHO/ICOH [5]. Up to the end of 2009, nine CODISs had provided experimentally some basic occupational services to 27 enterprises, and the types of industrials were metal, plastic, organic solvent, printing, and pharmaceutical, etc. The services provided by CODISs included risk or hazard assessment, education on health promotion, health examination and follow-up, education on the usage of personal protective equipment, return-to-work assistance, and ergonomic consultations, etc.

Conclusions

The experience of the establishment of Center of Occupational Disease and Injury Service and their networks is an effective approach. Future work of the CODIMS, the nine CODISs, and the network hospitals are to provide the more basic occupational health services under the implementation of national occupational health services program, to extend the notification of occupational disease, to notification of work-related disease, to improve the quality of services, to link the results of notification with the compensable cases by the National Labor Insurance, and to develop features centers with specific functions.

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References

[2] Labor Safety and Health Act (Announced on 1974.04.16; Modified on 2002.06.12)
摘要

由於職業病的低診斷率與低通報率、缺乏針對職災勞工的復健與復工協助服務，第一家職業傷病診治中心於 2003 年在勞委會的補助下於台大醫院成立，迄 2009 年共有九家職業傷病防治中心提供職業傷病相關服務，三家分布在北區、三家分布在中區、二家分布在南區與一家分布在東區。2007 年勞委會為了提升職業傷病通報及診治服務品質，委託成立職業傷病防治專業幕僚單位-職業傷病管理服務中心，此外，不同區域的醫療機構也與該轄區的職業傷病防治中心建立合作關係，成爲職業傷病防治網絡醫院，讓各地區的勞工人能就近接受到職業傷病的相關服務，2009 年底職業傷病門診服務已達每週 150 診次。職業傷病管理服務中心主要的工作內容為齊一職業傷病防治中心作業標準、提升職業傷病通報及診治服務品質與提供職業傷病防治的專業諮詢與服務。

目前職業病通報數量已顯著增加，尤其是在 2006 到 2008 年間，勞保職災補償之案例也在同期間增加。建立職業傷病中心的經驗和網絡醫院是一種建構台灣職業傷病服務的有效方法。為了配合國家推動職業健康服務方案的推動，未來的工作為提供更多具成效與品質的職業健康服務，擴展職業傷病與工作相關之疾病的通報，並持續改善中心服務品質。

關鍵詞：職業傷病服務、通報、職業健康服務