NEW METHODOLOGY FOR HEALTH CARE ACTIVITY

The International Labour Organization has developed and applied a new method to improve working conditions in small and medium-sized enterprises. The method is based on training of owners and managers of small and medium-sized enterprises. In the training, owners and managers learn low-cost ways of improving working conditions and productivity. The method of training is characterized with the following six principles: 1) Build on local practice. 2) Focus on achievement. 3) Link working conditions with other management goals. 4) Use learning-by-doing. 5) Encourage exchange of experience. 6) Promote workers' involvement. As shown in these principles, one of the most important ideas of this new method is to value entrepreneurs' and workers' autonomic activities.

The training is done not by giving lectures but by showing examples of implemented improvement of productivity and working conditions at the local enterprises. Participants must find out simple rules to improve productivity and working conditions from those examples. They must also think whether such ways of improvement are applicable to their own factory or not. Referring to those examples of improvement and drawn-up rules, entrepreneurs start to make action plans to improve productivity and working conditions. According to the action plans, they implement the improvement and report the results at the training course. The role of the trainers is to encourage participation of the owners and managers in the training, and to give suggestions and technical information for the improvement but not to show solutions. The training is the starting point of autonomic activities to improve productivity and working conditions.

In the field of occupational safety and health, the importance of autonomic activities of entrepreneurs and workers was pointed out for the first time by the Report of the British Committee on Safety and Health at Work, the so-called Sir Roben's Report, in 1972. The report says that the traditional approach based on ever-increasing and detailed statutory regulations has brought about a rude and idle attitude against occupational safety and health. In order to promote progressively better occupational safety and health conditions, it is necessary to make voluntary standards and code of practice by entrepreneurs and workers. The process to find out problems and their solutions voluntarily is important. According to the principle of the report, several European countries amended occupational safety and health law. The effect of the new law has not yet been proved, but those countries are expecting good results.

Autonomic activity has been regarded as important also in the field of community health. When acute and communicable diseases were dominant, treatment, care and prevention of the disease were done by professional personnel such as physicians and nurses. In the case of acute diseases, as the progress of the disease is fast and the effect of treatment is drastic, rapid diagnosis and treatment based on professional knowledge and experience is necessary. Vaccination provided by medical staff is effective against many communicable diseases. Control of social environment, such as a water supply and treatment system, is effective to prevent some communicable diseases. The role of
professional personnel is directly connected to treatment, care and prevention of the disease. They take health care activities on themselves.

On the other hand, in the case of chronic diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes mellitus and ischemic heart diseases, treatment, care and prevention cannot be done only by professional personnel. The progress of the disease is very slow and effect of treatment is not obvious. Pharmacological medication is not so effective as that for acute and communicable diseases. Vaccination cannot be applied. Risk factors of the diseases are in the style of daily life, namely habits of eating, exercise, resting, work and so on. Professional personnel cannot check and control directly such habits in daily life. The only possible way to prevent and control the chronic diseases is to let people improve their custom and habits that may cause such diseases by themselves.

Autonomic activity has become the most important thing for health care activity both in the field of occupational health and community health. Corresponding to the shift of importance from professional health care activity to autonomic activity, a new methodology of health care activity should be developed. The new methodology might be composed of the ways of 1) training and education, 2) transferring information and technology, 3) motivating implementation, 4) exchanging experiences, and 5) evaluating the implementation of improvement. Under the new methodology for health care activities, the role of professional personnel should also be changed. Their role is not to take health care activities on themselves. Their roles might be 1) to provide adequate information about health care, 2) to motivate autonomic activities and exchanging experiences of implementation, 3) to develop simple and easy tools for the activities, 4) to find out good examples of health care activity and relay them, and 5) to evaluate the effect of improvement with easily understandable method. To perform these roles, professional personnel must know what kinds of health problems the workers or people in a community are facing, how they are solving those problems, and what they are thinking about health conditions and health care activities. Therefore, it is becoming more important to make observation of daily life activities and working conditions from the viewpoint of human ergology.

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