

Healthy Municipality for a Healthy Community: The Municipality of Martignacco

Background

The role of public administrations in the promotion of healthy occupational settings can be of outmost importance in the implementation of healthy policies.

The Municipality of Martignacco, a small city in the north-east of Italy, is currently working to spread health promotion within its community and to other nearby cities. Health promotion here is viewed as a possible different approach to health since it can be an added value to the health services, currently working for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illnesses. Working together to build a partnership for socio-economic development can start from healthy workplaces. New ways of co-operation among public administrations can also be envisaged.

The interest in health issues started in 1979 when a cardiovascular disease prevention project was proposed to the general population and, up until now, many other community projects have been implemented. Since then, a new mentality has been born, the mayor has realised that health can be utilised as a tool to promote social and economic development of the community and a strategy for health also has to include workers and the employees of the administration itself.

Hardly taking notice of OHS in public administration ...

Even if a national law (D.L. 626/94) for the protection of the workers within the occupational settings was recently

approved by the national government, very few public administration offices adhere to the prescriptions, as no real surveillance is performed. Small town administration offices rarely pay attention to the development of a health protection and promotion mentality so that workers, too, do not pay much attention to health issues.

... with the exception of Martignacco

In this respect, the municipality of Martignacco has recently approved a plan of study, evaluation and reporting of health risks related to the working hours.

Periodical visits of workplaces

Also following the European legislation, a medical doctor, specialist in occupational medicine, periodically visits all the employees within the municipality. After having estimated the noise levels of the exposed workers, lung and hearing functions are evaluated annually or bi-annually. If required, vision tests are also performed on the administrative personnel utilising a video terminal for more than twenty hours per week.

Working places are checked with respect to the possibility of having adaptable backs of chairs, thus enabling employees to sit in the right position without stressing the spine. Special adapters are added to the keyboards so that the wrist is relaxed, thus preventing carpal syndromes. Latest generation monitors are placed in such a way that window reflection does not prove to be a danger for the eyes. If more than two hours are worked at the computer, employ-

Contact:
Universita degli Studi di Perugia
Dr. Lamberto Briziarelli
Phone: +39-75-5857315
E-mail: lbrizigi@mailhost.unipg.it

Giuseppe Masanotti
Phone: +39-75-5857346
E-mail: joeym@tiscalinet.it



ees are allowed to take a ten minute break. During the physical examinations weight is measured and questions on lifestyle, such as alcohol and tobacco consumption, are also put to the employees.

Bringing in WHP

Within these visits, public administration's employees also have the opportunity to submit questions of any kind, thus allowing a much more comprehensive approach to their health problems. Training on security and health issues is also one of the key elements for maintaining staff health.

In training sessions, employees learn how to utilise protection devices like earplugs for street workers and other issues like stress, safety measures etc. What we are trying to promote is health promotion against law adherence mentality.

Creating a non-smoking environment

One important action performed by the municipality is to ban smoking within the municipal building both for personnel and for visitors. Even if this decision has raised some discussions among the employees, it was also highly appreciated by the smokers themselves, who took the opportunity to try to stop smoking.

A non-smoking centre was created in partnership with the general practitioners and non-smoking sessions are also organised periodically for the employees willing to quit.

In accordance with the decisions of a newly established Community Research Centre, communication will be forwarded to a group of public administrations asking the mayors to ban smoking within municipal buildings. Participating towns will confirm their commitment and a database of participating cities will be created.

Drawing conclusions

We think that public administrations can be natural health promotion settings and have a leading role in creating healthy working places and healthy employees.

If small initiatives, like the one presented here, are implemented and disseminated at local level, a movement of small towns, working for a better environment, could lead to the development of a new mentality within public administrations.

A better collaboration among safety and occupational sectors, public health and public administration could have an important added value for the development of new public health strategies.