

# **The Role of the Occupational Health Physician in Crisis Management: Lessons Learned During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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- Crisis management activity plan & Crisis management team
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# Crisis

- Emergency situation which disturbs the employees as well as leads to instability in the organization.
- Types of crisis:
  - Natural crisis
  - Technological crisis
  - Confrontation crisis
  - Crisis of organizational misdeeds
  - Crisis of management misconduct
  - Crisis due to workplace violence
  - Bankruptcy
- Public health crisis?

# COVID 19-Public health crisis

- COVID 19 is a typical example of public health crisis.
- The pandemic of the Covid 19 virus has pointed to all the weaknesses of modern society and globalization.
- The insatiable desire to travel and "discover unknown destinations" and the globalization of business created the conditions for the "explosion" of the pandemic. Cases of pandemics are known throughout history, but none of them affected such a large number of countries and people in such a short period of time.
- Although there were clear announcements for a pandemic at the end of January 2020, a relatively small number of organizations were prepared for it due to:
  - Negative experience with previous pandemic announcements
  - Lack of expertise in crisis management
  - Traditional problem solving when they arise
  - Contradictory information in the media
  - ...

# COVID-19: Public health crisis

- Two years after COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency, global estimates of excess deaths from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation indicate that 18,2 million people died due to the pandemic by Dec 31, 2021—three times higher than official records suggest. 100 million people have been plunged into extreme poverty by the pandemic, according to World Bank estimates.<sup>1</sup>
- At this moment, it is too early to perceive all consequences of this pandemic, but it is already clear that it will have huge impact on:
  - Health
  - Economy
  - Society
  - Politics
  - ...

<sup>1</sup>Editorial. COVID-19 pandemic: what's next for public health? The Lancet Public Health 2022;7(5):E391

# Crisis management

- Crisis management is art of dealing with sudden and unexpected events which disturb the employees, organization as well as external clients.<sup>1</sup>
- Crisis management refers to the identification of a threat to an organization and its stakeholders in order to mount an effective response to it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Prachi Juneja, <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/crisis-management>.

<sup>2</sup>Adam Hayes, Crisis Management, Investopedia 2021.

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# Crisis management activity plan

- Crisis management plan refers to a detailed plan which describes the various actions which need to be taken during critical situations or crisis.<sup>1</sup>
- A crisis management plan prepares an organization for the unpredictable, defines roles and responses, and minimizes the damage to the organization, its employees, and its customers.
- A crisis management plan outlines how your business will react if a crisis occurs. The plan should identify who will take action and what their roles will be. The goal of a crisis management plan is to minimize damage and restore business operations as quickly as possible.

<sup>1</sup>Prachi Juneja, <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/crisis-management>.

# Crisis management team

- Crisis Management team prepares an organization for inevitable threats. It is formed to protect an organization against the adverse effects of crisis. It should respond immediately to warning signals of crisis and execute relevant plans to overcome emergency situations.
- Crisis Management Team includes<sup>1</sup>
  - Chief executive officer and people closely associated with him
  - Board of directors
  - Human Resource Representatives
  - Head of departments
  - Media Advisors

<sup>1</sup>Prachi Juneja, <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/crisis-management>

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# The role of occupational health physician in crises

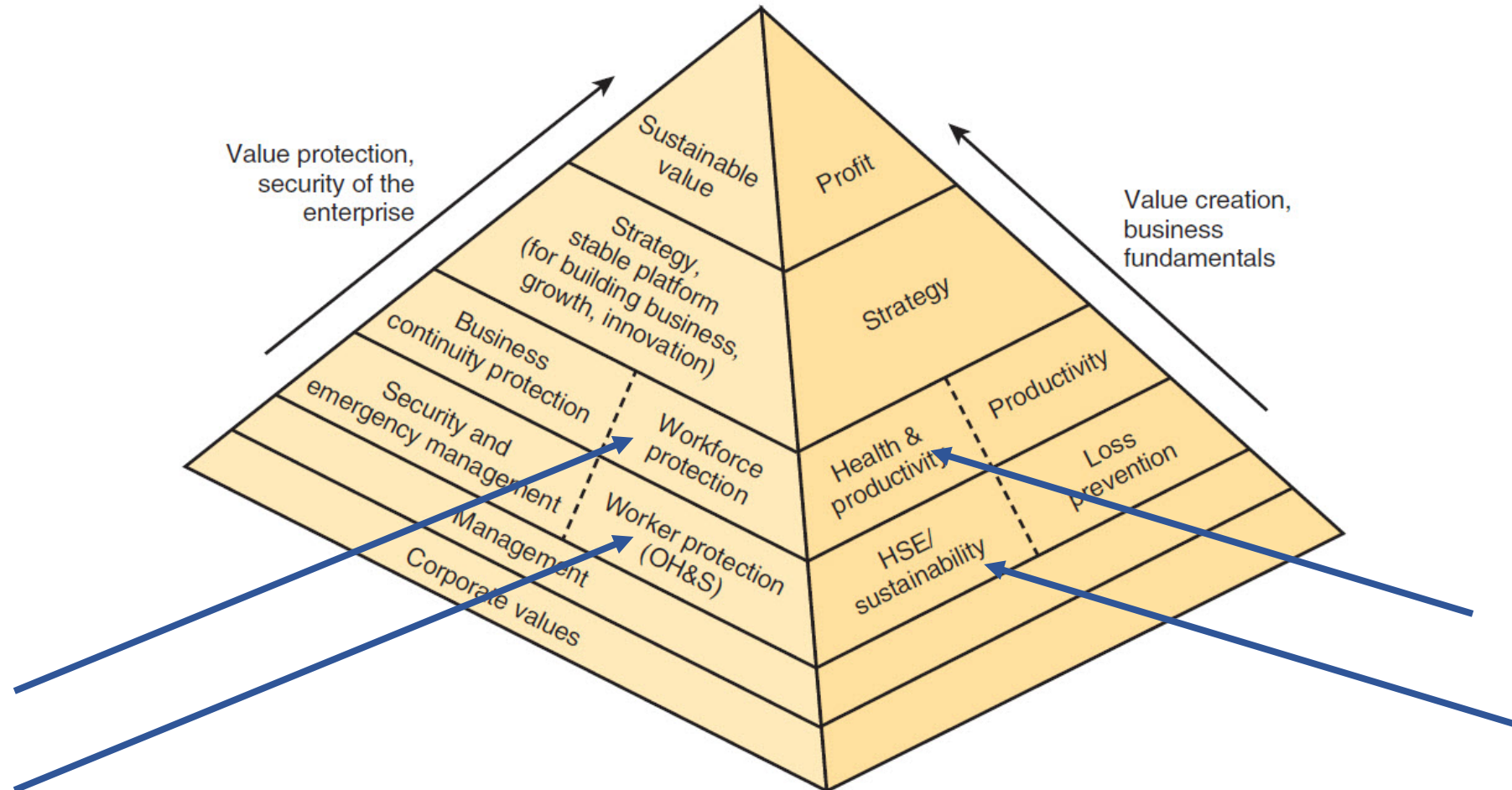
- Not a new topic, already explored and described:
  - Response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (Perce et al. 2007)
  - Response to Paris Terrorist attacks (Descatha et al. 2016)
  - OH – An asset in the time of crisis (Guidotti, 2006; interestingly cited only 3 times)
  - COVID-19 (Kammoun et al. 2022)

## Knowledge and Skills Occupational Health Professionals Need for Hazard Preparedness\*

- Knowledge of specific threats, including a broad range of chemical, biological, radiological, and physical hazards.
- Knowledge of personal protection and the skills to evaluate the adequacy of protection at the individual level.
- A systematic approach to monitoring and protecting the health of populations, workers, and others at risk.
- Skills in managing behavioral factors associated with the workplace and stressful events.
- Detailed knowledge of individual worksites, working populations, communities, and resources related to areas of responsibility.
- Managerial skills and the skills to effect change through policies and management of information.
- Clinical skills and an understanding of appropriate use of resources.
- Working knowledge of regulations, regulatory compliance, and the structure of local, state, and federal government agencies responsible for health protection.
- Experience in assessing vulnerability, evaluating individuals for fitness to work, and monitoring workplaces for safety and health protection applied in emergency situations.
- Expertise in risk management and risk communication in an emergency.

\*From AAOHN, 2004, 2005; ACOEM, 2006; and Rogers et al., 2003.

# Preserving value and protecting business continuity – the role of occupational health



**FIG 30-1** Schema for preserving value and protecting business continuity in a business enterprise, showing the strategic placement of business continuity protection and occupational health, after Jean-Pierre Robin. (Reprinted with permission from Guidotti TL. Emergency management at the enterprise level. In: Guidotti TL, ed. *Occupational Health Services: A Practical Approach*, 2nd ed. London, UK: Routledge; 2013, 389–403.)

# Role of the occupational health physician in the crisis management team

- ACOEM OEM Core Competencies: 2021.-10 OEM Core Competencies
  - 7th Competency-Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management:
    - OEM physicians may have a critical role in emergency preparedness, emergency management, and pandemic preparation and mitigation.
    - This includes playing a key role in protecting employees and families, health systems, companies, and government agencies, as well as contributing to the health of the national and global workforce by anticipating and preventing the economic consequences of disasters.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hartenbaum N, Baker B, Levin J, Saito K, Sayeed Y, Green-McKenzie J. ACOEM OEM Core Competencies: 2021. JOEM 2021;63 (7): e445-e461

# Role of the occupational health physician in crisis management team

- Collaboration with the employer on the development of the Business continuity plan for maintaining vital business activities during the crisis (pandemic)
- Participation in the work of the crisis management team (headquarters)
- Informing employees and employers about health risks and prevention possibilities
- Establishing a system of preventive measures in cooperation with the employer
- Continuous updating of measures in accordance with the recommendations of state bodies and experts
- Control of the implementation of agreed measures
- Recommendations for the protection of particularly vulnerable groups in the enterprise

# Role of the occupational health physician in crisis management team in case of pandemic

- Daily monitoring of the infection and reaction in case of the appearance of patients in the enterprise
- Establishing a connection with the local public health institution and provide daily information to a Crisis management team on the case incidence in the local community
- Organizing employee testing
- In cooperation with the epidemiological service, monitoring the contacts of infected persons in the enterprise and organizing isolation measures
- Vaccination
- Participating in Return to work programs
- Assistance in regulating sickness absence



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# Lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic

- The handling of the Present Pandemic by many governments worldwide, has been characterized by poor leadership and weak chains of command.
- More often than not, during this pandemic, we have seen how political and bureaucratic leaders have failed to Step Up and Rise to the Occasion, and instead, try to Pass the Buck.
- Occupational health physicians are an overlooked asset in crises.

# Lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Institutions in charge of occupational medicine at the state level should take a more decisive role in creating measures to protect the health of employees, especially in cases of public health crisis.
- A lot of effort should be invested to raise the influence of occupational physicians in the company in order to avoid the influence of informal groups and the spread of misinformation.

# Lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Based on the experiences during the COVID 19 pandemic, in the coming period more attention should be paid to the education of occupational physicians in the field of crisis management. In that way, we would prepare them for the crises that surely await us.
- It is expected that a large number of companies spurred on by the events of the COVID 19 pandemic will begin to review and / or develop new crisis management plans. It is necessary to invest an extra effort on informing the management of companies about the specific knowledge and expertise possessed by occupational physicians in order to include them in the development of crisis management plans.
- Analogously, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation with national and local governments, so that occupational physicians can contribute their knowledge in better crisis management of future crises.

# Final impression

- Occupational Medicine: An Asset in Time of Crisis

Tee L. Guidotti (2006)

# Thank you for your attention

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