

Scope of pre-placement examination in reducing occupational health hazards

Dear Editor:

In occupational health, ergonomics refers to the “science of work” that includes multiple strategies to allow appropriate adjustment in the workplace according to the needs of the worker [1]. Pre-placement examination is considered as one of the crucial initiative to ensure benefit to both employers and workers [1]. As the name suggests, each worker depending on the nature of their work is subjected to physical examination, laboratory / radiological examination, and elicitation of relevant history, prior to joining any new job [1-2]. This is recommended to enhance the diagnostic ability of a single screening test [1-2].

Realizing the scope of pre-placement examination in reducing any occupational hazard, it is broadly employed in some of the developed nations [3-4]. In-fact, an exhaustive pre-placement screening can achieve multiple objectives, namely

- Classifying workers into low risk - no need of further examination and high risk – need for future follow-up;
- Rationale selection of employees;
- Provides enough evidence to formulate systematic plans to help workers to get adjusted to their job;
- Contributes morbidity data to allow future comparison;
- Reduction in health risks to the workers;
- Improvement in the quality of life of workers;
- Minimizing the load on health sector / insurance agencies;
- Promotes healthy alliance between worker & employer;
- Reduction in incidence of sickness absenteeism;

- Fosters development of a healthy environment at workplace; and
- Increases the output of the industry [1, 5-7].

However, global application of pre-placement examination across all industries has still not been achieved [1-3]. This has been attributed to recognition of multiple challenges / barriers like test related parameters (viz. indications, frequency, standardization of results) [8]; economic & manpower constraints (viz. human resource, infrastructure, logistics, etc.) [9]; and pre-placement screening quality [10]; in different sectors. In other words, employment of pre-placement screening is determined by a composite set of economic factors, legal provisions, and recent advancement in medicine [8, 10].

The most cost-effective strategy to counter the potential barriers is by development of a comprehensive strategy to assist the employer in streamlining pre-placement screening in variable settings [8]. However, mere development of an exhaustive policy will not serve the purpose, unless the employers are simultaneously motivated for its universal implementation [9-10]. In addition, the role of regular monitoring / supervision activity can never be ignored as it facilitates prompt rectification of flawed measures [10].

In conclusion, a comprehensive pre-placement examination is a crucial strategy to improve the health status of workers and simultaneously reduce the incidence of occupational health hazards.

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