

**OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH NURSING**  
**QUICK REFERENCE**  
**CAREER GUIDE**

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**ABOHN**

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### **A. What is Occupational Health?**

In general, the term - occupational health - refers to caring for and protecting the workforce. This broad definition integrates traditional occupational safety and health protection efforts with health promotion strategies and other workplace activities to prevent illness and injury and maximize health. Occupational Health affords all workers the opportunity to achieve optimal levels of safety and well-being

The occupational health nurse is the guiding force in keeping workers healthy, maintaining company compliance with regulations, curbing medical costs and assessing the environmental factors that affect the workplace and the community which it serves.

The field of occupational health nursing is a dynamic public health specialty that has amazing growth, professional development and leadership opportunities. Occupational health nurses can practice wherever there are employees, such as hospitals, construction and manufacturing facilities, government agencies, and the entertainment industry to name a few. Occupational Health Nurses are also making a difference in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining, construction, transportation and aerospace industries.

To have a successful occupational health nursing practice, nurses must build on their clinical practice knowledge. Depending on the industry, this knowledge might incorporate chemical hazards, ergonomics, biological hazards, psychophysiological (stress), safety and industrial issues, standards and regulations, disease management, health education, records keeping, and business management concepts.

The major roles and responsibilities associated with occupational health nursing practice include:

- **Clinician**
  - Clinical and Primary Care
- **Educator/Coordinator**
  - Training
  - Disease Prevention
- **Manager/Advisor**
  - Research
  - Health Promotion
- **Consultant**
  - Workforce Issues
  - Workplace Issues
  - Environmental Issues
- **Case Manager**
  - Regulatory responsibilities
  - Legislative management

## **B. Occupational Health Nurse Compensation Information**

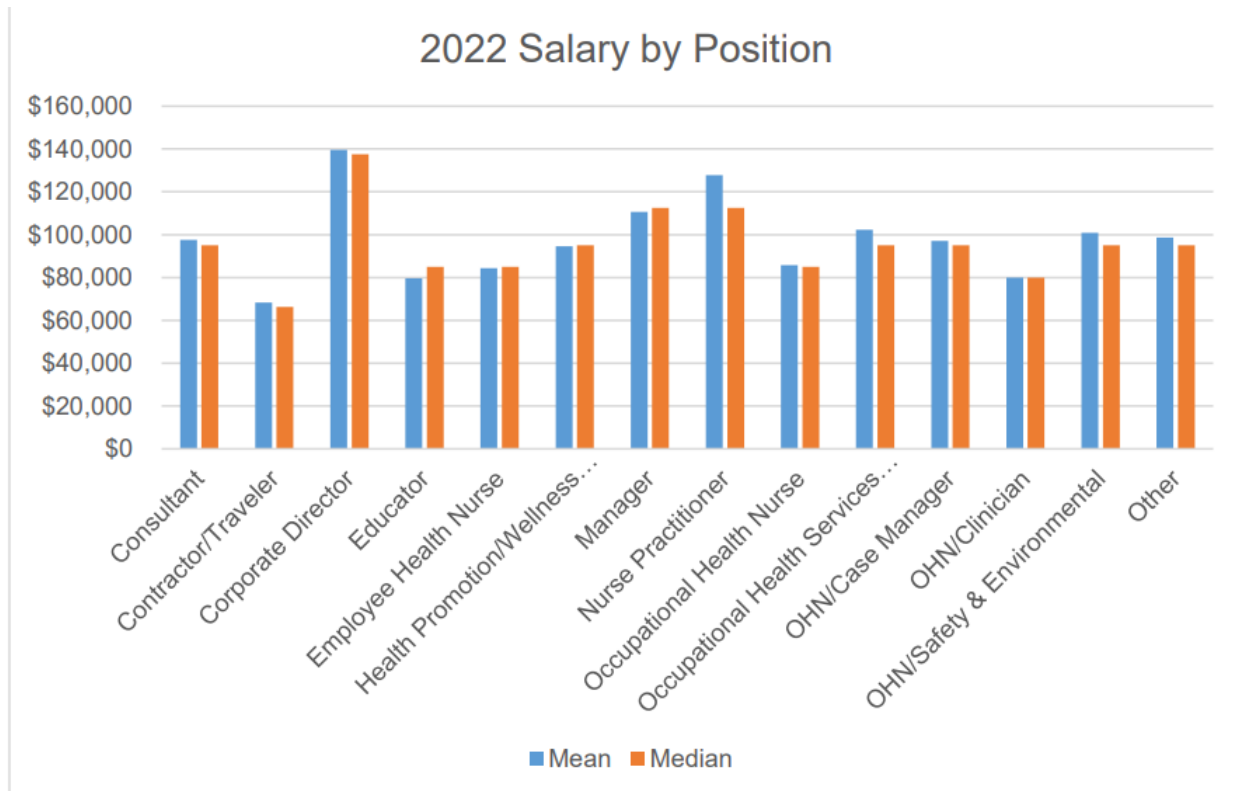
According to the AAOHN 2022 Compensation & Benefits Survey, in 2022, the average of salary Occupational Health Nurses is \$98,842 and the median salary is \$95,000. Since 2018, the average salary has increased 13.6%, and the median salary has increased by 14.5%.

The survey also demonstrated that the type of occupational and environmental health nursing certification obtained by respondents impacts salary. Participants with additional certifications earn significantly more:

- COHN-S (\$112,408)
- COHN/CM (\$105,000)
- COHN-S/CM (\$110,208)
- COHN (93,531)

Also, the higher the education level and age of the member; the higher the salary.

(AAOHN 2022 Compensation & Benefits Survey. [https://www.aaohn.org/Portals/0/docs/AAOHN\\_2022SalarySurvey\\_Summary\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.aaohn.org/Portals/0/docs/AAOHN_2022SalarySurvey_Summary_FINAL.pdf))



AAOHN 2022 Compensation & Benefits Survey. [https://www.aaohn.org/Portals/0/docs/AAOHN\\_2022SalarySurvey\\_Summary\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.aaohn.org/Portals/0/docs/AAOHN_2022SalarySurvey_Summary_FINAL.pdf)

## C. Professional Organizations in Occupational Health

### **The American Board for Occupational Health Nurses, Inc. – ABOHN**

[www.abohn.org](http://www.abohn.org)

The mission of ABOHN is to promote a standard of excellence in occupational health nursing through certification. ABOHN is the sole credentialing body for occupational health nurses and offers two core credentials and one specialty credential. The core credentials are the Certified Occupational Health Nurse (COHN) and the Certified Occupational Health Nurse - Specialist (COHN-S). The specialty credential is Case Management (CM).

### **The American Association of Occupational Health Nurses – AAOHN**

[www.aaohn.org](http://www.aaohn.org)

The AAOHN mission is to advance the health, safety, and productivity of domestic and global workforces by providing:

- education
- research
- public policy
- and practice resources

for occupational and environmental health nurses. It is the largest education forum for occupational health nursing in the United States.

### **Association of Occupational Health Professionals in Healthcare – AOHP**

[www.aohp.org](http://www.aohp.org)

AOHP is dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of healthcare personnel. AOHP is the only national professional organization with the exclusive mission of addressing the needs and concerns of occupational health professionals in healthcare settings.

Occupational health nurses/professionals take responsibility for employee care. They have a responsibility to advocate for organizational policies that help to recognize occupational hazards and advocate for new and safe technologies. Over 1,000 occupational health nurses, nurse practitioners, physicians and physician assistants belong to AOHP, the single best resource for addressing the unique issues of occupational health.

## D. ABOHN Board Certification in Occupational Health

Certification is a voluntary mechanism for validating professional knowledge and expertise in a specialty. In contrast to licensure, which assures the public of safe practice at a beginning level, certification reflects specialty practice and knowledge at a proficient level. By meeting the challenge of certification, the certified individual has made a commitment to a specialty and to continued professional growth and development. Certification is recognized by employers and peers as an achievement and leads to employment opportunities, advancement, and professional prestige.

ABOHN uses the definition of occupational and environmental health nursing and the standards of practice, in addition to other criteria, to determine eligibility for certification. The American Association of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN) establishes the definition and standards of specialty practice. The entire document is available from the AAOHN National Office. Email is [info@aaohn.org](mailto:info@aaohn.org).

ABOHN currently offers two core credentials:

- Certified Occupational Health Nurse (COHN)
- Certified Occupational Health Nurse – Specialist (COHN-S)

and one specialty credential:

- Case Management (CM).

ABOHN has different education qualifications for COHN and COHN-S examinations. However, if an individual qualifies for both examinations, just having a higher degree does not necessarily mean they should take the examination with the higher degree qualification. It is **highly recommended** that the individual chooses the examination that fits their practice, not level of education.

### **Benefits of certification:**

- Demonstrates knowledge and competence in occupational health
- Indication of specialty expertise
- Enhanced professional profile and CV
- Recognized by industry and regulatory agencies as mark of prestige
- Significant personal and professional accomplishment
- Leads to career advancement opportunities
- Increased employment opportunities & transferability: employers use certification in employment decisions
- Demonstrated commitment to worker health and safety
- Leads to increases in pay and promotions

## E. Occupational Health Nurse Advice

- **Become comfortable in your practice:** be mindful of remaining organized in your practice. There are many moving parts within occupational health clinics including clinical and business tasks. Occupational Health Nurses wear many hats and it is important that we develop a system of keeping our processes and tasks coordinated and streamlined. Establish practices with reminders for clinic processes such as medication inventory and expiration. Take on the mindset of always being “audit ready”. Additionally, know when to and become comfortable with delegating tasks. Develop and refine a strong business acumen in order to appropriately liaison with key stakeholders, organizational leadership, and the needs of the workers.
- **Develop rapport & trust with workers:** the occupational health practice setting varies from others in that our workers are usually with us for far longer than one shift or one week. For the entire tenure of the employee, they become our patient, which presents the opportunity to develop a different level of rapport. The occupational health nurse will be privy to life events impacting workers such as marriages, divorces, deaths, birth of children, etc. It is important to capitalize on the moments when employees must come to the clinic for routine exams and testing as well as interactions that are not required to establish trust. Once rapport is established, workers will feel comfortable voicing concerns and possible issues for early intervention.
- **Network and develop rapport with other Occupational Health Nurses:** occupational health is a niche specialty and while most OHNs work with/on teams, there are many situations where OHNs can feel siloed. Networking and developing rapport with other OHNs can prove invaluable when benchmarking processes, encountering new situations, seeking out new opportunities, transitioning positions, and much more. Leverage opportunities to network and build connections with OHNs within current organizations and across all industries while at conferences, review courses, and all other available venues.
- **Obtain and maintain as many certifications and training as available:** the occupational health specialty is extremely diverse and requires a balance between clinical, business, and leadership skills. The occupational health nurse never knows what to expect walking in the door. From personal medical emergencies, such as stroke, cardiac events, or anaphylactic reactions, to mental health issues including stress, anxiety, and chronic conditions, to natural disasters impacting the business such as hurricanes, blizzards, and pandemics. The occupational health nurse must also develop and maintain business skills such as presentations, stakeholder management, and crisis management to name a few. It is of the utmost importance to maintain all of these skills sharp and up to date in order to respond with accuracy and confidence.