

The multifaceted role of the Socio-Healthcare Operator (OSS) in maternity and neonatal wards: bridging clinical care and emotional support

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Keypoints

Through practical assistance, emotional support, and vigilant observation, healthcare operator personnel improve maternal and neonatal outcomes while fostering a family-centered, patient-focused hospital environment.

Abstract

The Socio-Healthcare Operator (OSS) plays a pivotal role in hospital settings, particularly in maternity and neonatal care. Beyond their supportive functions, OSS professionals carry out diverse responsibilities that directly influence maternal and neonatal outcomes, enhance patient satisfaction, and improve healthcare team efficiency. This study highlights the multifaceted contributions of OSS staff, emphasizing their integral role in creating a patient-centered environment where clinical care and emotional support coexist.

Keywords

Socio-Healthcare Operator, OSS, maternal care, neonatal care, patient-centered care, healthcare support, hospital efficiency

Introduction

The Socio-Healthcare Operator (OSS), known in Italy as “Operatore Socio Sanitario,” represents a crucial figure in hospital care, particularly in maternity and neonatal wards. While often considered a support role, the OSS performs a wide range of duties that directly impact maternal and neonatal outcomes, patient satisfaction, and the overall efficiency of healthcare teams. This article

examines the responsibilities, challenges, and contributions of OSS professionals, emphasizing their role in fostering a patient-centered environment where clinical care and emotional support intersect.

Historical and Regulatory Context

The role of the OSS in Italy was formally recognized in 2001 with the implementation of the national healthcare framework defining professional qualifications and responsibilities. OSS personnel are trained to provide both social assistance and basic healthcare support, working under the supervision of nurses and physicians. In maternity and neonatal wards, this dual competence allows them to address both physical and emotional needs of mothers and newborns, making them an indispensable part of the healthcare team (Chiappini et al., 2018).

The OSS in Maternity Wards

1. Physical and Daily Assistance

OSS personnel support mothers with essential daily activities, including personal hygiene, mobility, and feeding. Assistance in these areas promotes patient comfort and reduces the risk of complications such as pressure

sores or infections. Additionally, OSS staff help mothers adapt to hospital routines and navigate recovery after delivery.

2. Monitoring and Reporting

Though OSS personnel are not responsible for medical diagnosis, they serve as the first observers of subtle changes in maternal health. They report signs of postpartum complications, such as hemorrhage, fever, or abnormal emotional states, to the nursing team promptly, allowing timely interventions.

3. Emotional and Social Support

Becoming a mother can be physically and emotionally demanding. OSS professionals provide empathetic listening, reassurance, and guidance, helping mothers manage anxiety, cope with pain, and adjust to new responsibilities. Their support often enhances maternal confidence and satisfaction with the birth experience.

4. Education and Advocacy

OSS staff support educational initiatives, such as breastfeeding, infant care, and postnatal hygiene. They help reinforce instructions provided by nurses and midwives, ensuring that mothers understand and follow recommended practices (Toth et al., 2018).

The OSS in Neonatal Wards

Neonatal care is highly specialized, and the OSS contributes significantly to both routine care and the emotional support of families.

1. Newborn Care and Hygiene

OSS personnel assist in bathing, diapering, and dressing newborns. They also participate in the sterilization of feeding bottles and medical instruments, adhering to

strict hygiene protocols essential for preventing infections in vulnerable neonates.

2. Feeding Support

OSS staff play a vital role in supporting feeding, including bottle feeding, breastfeeding facilitation, and preparation of expressed breast milk. They work closely with nurses and lactation consultants to ensure neonates receive adequate nutrition.

3. Observation and Safety

The OSS is trained to observe infants for behavioral or health changes, such as difficulty feeding, irritability, or signs of distress. Early detection of these issues can significantly improve neonatal outcomes by prompting timely interventions from the medical team.

4. Family-Centered Care

Parental involvement is crucial in neonatal care. OSS staff help parents engage with their newborns through skin-to-skin contact, guided caregiving, and education on neonatal routines. Their support helps reduce parental anxiety and strengthens the parent-infant bond (Spencer et al., 2021; Keller et al., 2020)

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The effectiveness of OSS personnel relies on seamless collaboration with the healthcare team. They act as liaisons between nurses, midwives, physicians, and families, ensuring that care is continuous, personalized, and safe. OSS contributions are particularly valuable in early detection of complications, patient education reinforcement, and maintaining continuity of care.

Training and Professional Development

Working in maternity and neonatal wards requires both technical competence and emotional resilience.

Continuous education programs, simulation training, and interprofessional workshops are essential for OSS personnel to stay updated on clinical practices, neonatal care protocols, and psychosocial support techniques. Professional development also mitigates occupational stress, improving job satisfaction and patient care quality (Chiappini et al., 2018).

Challenges and Opportunities

OSS personnel face unique challenges in maternity and neonatal settings, including high-stress environments, emotional demands of patient care, and the need for constant vigilance. Despite these challenges, their work contributes to improved maternal and neonatal outcomes, enhanced family satisfaction, and a more effective healthcare system overall. Recognizing and supporting OSS professionals through training, fair staffing, and emotional support programs is critical for sustaining high-quality care.

Conclusion

The Socio-Healthcare Operator is a cornerstone of care in maternity and neonatal wards. Through practical assistance, emotional support, and vigilant observation, OSS personnel improve maternal and neonatal outcomes while fostering a family-centered, patient-focused hospital environment. Their multifaceted role, though sometimes underrecognized, is essential for delivering holistic, high-quality care.

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