

Occupational Health Manager Information

Work can have a positive impact on our health and wellbeing. In turn, healthy and well motivated employees can have an equally positive impact on the productivity and effectiveness of a business. However, evidence does also suggest that an unhealthy work environment can lead to ill health and absence from work.

**The long term strategy for occupational health is to ensure:
“Work does not impact on health and health is not impacted on by work”.**

The role of occupational health

- Occupational health is an advisory and impartial service providing advice on health related matters for both employees and management.
- OH advise management on employee health and fitness to work and can request medical reports from GP or specialists when necessary where the employee is long term sick or has a complex medical condition.
- Plan phased return to work programmes tailored to the employee’s particular needs taking into account the working environment and organisational practices.
- Identify trends in ill health causing short and long term absence. Health promotion strategies and management training can then be focused on these particular areas.
- Attend sickness absence review meetings and case conferences as required and advise management on relevant occupational health matters including fitness for work.
- Advise on an employee’s medical fitness to attend a disciplinary or management meeting.
- Review staff with chronic health issues and disability related conditions at regular intervals to ensure any adjustments remain effective and appropriate; in relation to The Equality Act (2010) DDA (1995)
- Health screening for the purpose of new employment.
- Immunisations: Hepatitis B, hepatitis A, TB jabs and flu vaccinations.
- Provide ergonomic advice and workstation assessments.
- Carry out health surveillance screening when required
- Advise when additional support such as counselling or physiotherapy would benefit an employee

Perceptions of Occupational Health

I am being sent to occupational health to be reprimanded for being off sick

Not true. The role of occupational health is to advise management of the condition, the employee’s fitness to work and make recommendations to support the employee safely and successfully back into the workplace. Decisions on SUMC and DDA are usually required following absence and as occupational health are contracted to provide this advice to management, this may be why the referral has been requested by the manager.

Occupational health will fight my corner against management.

Not true: OH is an impartial service and we do not take sides.

What occupational health says has to be put in place by the organisations.

The advice we provide is based on a wide scope of clinical expertise and up to date evidence based practice. Occupational health can offer advice and guidance about the condition but it is management's decision whether the recommendations can be accommodated.

When is it recommended that management refer employees to occupational health?

When the employee is long term sick – Management would be advised to refer to attendance management policy for guidance.

Mental Health conditions (stress, depression and anxiety). Don't wait until the employee has taken absence. Advice can be given on modifying work patterns to keep workers at work whilst they recover from there injury/illness.

Occupational health can provide guidance on return to work plans.

Where management require advice whether a physiotherapy and/or counselling referral will help the employee in their recovery.

What to expect from the occupational health service

Management are required to complete a referral form. The manager needs to make the employee aware that they are referring the employee to Occupational Health to obtain advice regards their fitness for work. Managers might want to ask specific questions – up to 3 additional questions are allowed.

Face-to-face or telephone assessments are organised, dependant upon whether the employee is currently attending work or not. If a face-to-face assessment is arranged, you can bring someone along for support. No more than one person is requested due to time and location of clinics. Please be advised that occupational health is restricted from answering questions directly from family or union. This is due to medical confidentiality reasons and because the occupational assessment is directly with the employee.

Occupational health will summarise in the report to manager:

- The presenting situation and a professional opinion on fitness to attend work, what support might be required and prognosis of the condition.

The occupational health practitioner will require verbal consent from the employee to release the report to management and shared service centre. The line manager should be in receipt of the report within 2 working days from the consultation; unless the employee prefers to view the report, prior to being sent to the manager.

All conversations between the OH practitioner and the employee are treated as confidential. That is, unless there is real Health and Safety concerns for the employee or the establishment.

What is the fit note?

The fit note was introduced to replace the old sick note on 6 April 2010. Doctor's issue fit notes to individuals to provide evidence of the advice the doctor has given about the individual's fitness for work.

In some cases, employers receive conflicting medical opinions. The employee's own General Practitioner or hospital doctor may state that an individual is unfit to return to work and issue a Fit note to that effect. The occupational health doctor, or occupational health advisor, who understands the working environment very well and has undertaken an assessment for work, may be able to advise the employer that there is work that is suitable for the person.

New guidance published by the government has made it clear that the Fit note is not binding, it is advice. It is for employers to determine whether or not to accept the information on the Fit note.

Going Forward

For more information about the OH Assist™ Occupational Health Service, go to www.ohassist.com or contact your Human Resource Department.