

## **Guidance for Employees: What happens when I'm referred to Occupational Health**

It is understandable that you may feel apprehensive about being referred to see an Occupational Health Practitioner (OHP); however, this leaflet is intended to help you understand what will happen and how it can help you.

### **Why have I been referred?**

You will usually have been asked to see an OHP because a health problem (or a possible health problem) has been identified which may affect your ability to work or attend work. Your manager should have explained the reasons behind the referral, asked you to sign the referral form and been given, or sent, a copy of the form.

### **What is an Occupational Health Practitioner?**

They are either medically qualified doctors with additional training in occupational medicine, or nurses with specialist training in occupational health or physiotherapists specialising in musculoskeletal conditions in the workplace. They assess an individual's fitness for work through:

- Considering the ways previous, existing or potential health problems may be affected or helped by different work demands, working practices, factors in the workplace and/or the time spent undertaking different tasks at work
- By their understanding of the health risks associated with exposure to various hazards of the workplace.

### **Do I have to make an appointment?**

No, the occupational health service makes the appointment after receiving the referral paperwork from your manager, and your appointment will normally be within 10-working days.

### **What will I be asked?**

The OHP will explore your health problems with you and consider the effects that your work may be having on your health or, more commonly, the effects that a particular health problem is having on your ability to work. In order to assess your capability for work the OHP will discuss your current health problem, the information and questions from your referring manager, as well as asking about:

- Details of your specific job and what you are exposed to when doing it;
- Individual tasks / duties / responsibilities you may have at work and how you are required to undertake them – the specific physical, emotional or psychological demands;
- Patterns of team working and shift patterns;
- Relationships with colleagues;
- Line management reporting structures;
- Previous medical history;
- Your life outside of work.

and how any of the above may be impacting on your health problem or the problems you are experiencing. Sometimes, but not always, a physical examination may be required. This examination usually focuses on the specific health problem being experienced rather than being a general examination. The emphasis is on your capability for work and whether your workplace, duties or working hours might need to be adjusted, temporarily or permanently, to help you with your health problem.

### Is this service confidential?

Yes. No-one outside the Occupational Health Service is entitled to see the medical notes recorded during the consultation without your explicit written consent (permission).

### Will you need to contact my GP?

Not often, but sometimes the OHP will require specific medical information from your GP or Specialist to assist in assessing your capability for work. This is also completed in strict medical confidentiality and can only be undertaken with your informed, signed consent. The OHP will ask you to sign a “consent” form confirming your permission to contact your GP or Specialist.

### What happens after the appointment?

The OHP will prepare a report for your manager, which will not contain detailed information about your medical condition or other sensitive personal information. After the contents have been discussed with you during your appointment you will be asked to sign a “consent” form confirming your permission for the report to be sent out. You will be sent a copy or, if you prefer, you can read the report before it is sent to your manager, so that you can check for any errors or omissions. The OHP will not alter their opinion or add information that was not discussed with you during the appointment. Some practitioners may choose to dictate the report during your appointment, but you can still ask to see a copy before it is sent to your manager.

Following the initial Occupational Health appointment, which may take between 30 to 60 minutes, review appointments of some 15 to 30 minutes are sometimes arranged and may be carried out over the telephone. The purpose is to assess your progress and to explore if anything else needs to be done. The OHP will discuss any need for follow-up appointments with you.

### Do I have the right to stop Occupational Health making a report?

By attending the appointment you have accepted the process, including a report will be written to your manager. You can withdraw your consent to participate in the process at any stage. Your employer will be informed and will then need to act based on a reasonable assessment of the information they do hold.

### Is there anything I can do if I don't agree with what Occupational Health has said?

Yes. You can discuss any errors or omissions with the OHP or submit your own written comments to the OHP and/or your line manager and/or Human Resources/Personnel.

### How can the referral help me?

The OHP may make a range of recommendations to the referring manager. For example, that the hours or days that you work be adjusted, or that temporary or permanent alternative duties be considered. If you are currently absent from work these steps can enable a return at the earliest possible opportunity. Additional control measures may be recommended to reduce exposure to risks within your workplace.

### How does this help my employer?

The advice aims to help your employer consider steps to assist you to work safely and effectively, or to help you return to work if currently absent. The report is advisory and your manager would need to consider the practicality of implementing any advice / recommendations.

If you would like further advice about being referred to occupational health then please contact our Nurse Advice Line on 0117 34 23400 (Monday to Friday, 08:30 to 16:00 hours, but not Bank Holidays).