

Health warning

An introduction to Occupational Health – and why it's so important for your company

According to the World Health Organisation, the purpose of occupational health is "To promote and maintain the physical, mental and social wellbeing of all staff."

Occupational health studies the effect of work on health and health on work. It concentrates on employee performance, suitability, fitness, wellbeing and safety issues linked to health at work. As a result it will improve an organisation's ability to deliver by addressing issues of illness, absence and poor performance.

Reducing the cost burden

Work-related ill-health is escalating throughout the western world. Sickness absence costs UK plc more than £13 billion each year. Add to this the fact that healthy workers are more productive, and it's clear that having an effective occupational health provision in place can make a big difference to your bottom line.

More and more companies are turning to occupational health and safety services to drive down costs by preventing people being made ill by their work, reducing sickness absence, rehabilitating employees after ill health and helping people back to work.

Employers are required by law to protect their employees' health at work. There is also a growing trend towards litigious action against employers, adding further to the risk burden of companies. All of this makes occupational health even more vital.

How BPIF can help

BPIF is introducing a new Occupational Health Support Service for its members.

The service aims to:

- Promote and maintain the highest possible level of physical, mental and social wellbeing of all employees by identifying and managing health risks;
- Support member organisations in their compliance with Health and Safety legislation.

Occupational Health specialists can offer a range of services, including:

- Implementing an effective sickness absence management policy and rehabilitation support. This involves exploring the causes of absence; obtaining confidential information from GPs and specialists; offering advice to management; and making recommendations on rehabilitation and adjustments to promote graded return to work.
- Providing health surveillance medicals to employees exposed to work processes which could create stress and pose a risk to their health. Mobile health surveillance clinics, operated by trained Occupational Health Technicians, can carry out onsite health assessments including health screens, lung function tests, health MOTs, vision screening, hearing tests, urine screens etc.
- Pre-employment screening. This involves prospective employees completing a pre-recruitment health screening questionnaire, which is then reviewed by an Occupational Health Adviser.

This can provide guidance to the employer on the likelihood of an individual being able to give regular and efficient service for the foreseeable future, as well as the mental and physical vulnerabilities that require reasonable adjustments to workstations and working conditions.

- Health promotion campaigns – health events can be organised by Occupational Health Advisers to tackle work-related stress issues, ensuring that information for staff is current, topical and practical.
- Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) – these can often be an invaluable asset in providing impartial and confidential support to employees. EAPs can ensure a bespoke and cost-effective service is provided, depending on the requirements of the organisation.

Partnering for success

A strong partnership between HR, Management and Occupational Health can help ensure that protocols and procedures are developed to keep employees happy, healthy and at work, and provide reassurance that you are fulfilling your legal obligations in relation to work-related illness.

→ For more information please contact Philip Thompson, Team Manager for the ViP Core Team on 020 7915 8377 or email philip.thompson@bpif.org.uk



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