

Patient Information Leaflet

What happens when you are referred to an Occupational Health Practitioner

It is understandable that you may feel apprehensive about being referred to an Occupational Health Practitioner, however this leaflet is intended to help you understand what will happen and how it can help with your health problems.

Why have I been referred?

You will usually have been asked to see the Occupational Health Practitioner because a possible health problem has been identified which may affect your ability to work.

What is an Occupational Health Practitioner?

They are medically qualified doctors and Occupational Health Nurses Specialists, both, with specialist training in occupational medicine. 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.

Is it confidential?

Yes. No other party, outside of the occupational health department, is entitled to see the medical notes recorded during the consultation without your explicit written permission.

What will they do to me?

You will be given an appointment as soon as possible. The doctor will explore your health problems with you, and consider the main condition that is having an effect on your work and any other health problems, past or present, that may have a bearing on employment. Sometimes, but not always, a physical examination may be needed. 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 how the work, workplace, duties or working hours might need to be adjusted, temporarily or permanently, to help you with your health problem.

What will I be asked?

The purpose of the consultation is to concentrate on the effects that something may be having on your health, or the effects that a particular health problem is having on your ability

to work. In assessing your capability for work from these two viewpoints, the doctor will ask 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;
- Patterns of team working
- Relationships with colleagues;
- Line management reporting structures;
- Working/shift patterns;

And how these may be affecting the health problem or problems you are experiencing. Specific physical, emotional or psychological demands of the work that you undertake will be considered.

Do you need to contact my GP?

Often the doctor will need to know your previous medical background to assist him in assessing your capability for work. As mentioned previously this is in strict medical confidence and can only be undertaken with your informed, signed consent. The doctor will ask you to sign a Consent form confirming your permission.

How can the referral help me?

As an example of what help can be given, the Occupational Health Practitioner may; recommend to the person requesting the referral; that temporary or permanent alternative duties be conducted; The hours or days that you work adjusted; Recommend additional control measures be implemented to reduce exposure to risks at the workplace.

How does this help my employer?

The purpose of the Occupational Health assessment is to help ensure:

- Fitness for employment;
- Better job placement;
- More effective treatment of injuries and illness at work;
- Improved management of sickness absence;
- Better standards of safety and morale;
- Confidential opportunity to explore questions of under performance that may be linked to a health problem;
- A way of improving productivity;
- May assist in reducing staff turnover;
- Consider if an application for early ill health retirement is appropriate;
- The employer and employees comply with current legislation.

Following the initial Occupational Health appointment, which can take up to 30 minutes, review appointments of some 15 minutes may, periodically, be needed. Their purpose is to assess the steps that have been taken to help you and your employer and to explore if anything else needs to be done. The Occupational Health Practitioner will discuss any need for follow-up appointments with you.