



QUALITY STANDARDS FOR THE NEW HEALTH AND WORK SERVICE

Joint position statement from the Faculty of Occupational Medicine and Society of Occupational Medicine

The Society of Occupational Medicine and the Faculty of Occupational Medicine welcome the news that the Department for Work and Pension's Health and Work Service is expected to become operational during 2014. In order for it to be effective, the new service needs to be adequately funded so that it provides a gateway to a quality assured specialist occupational health advice for all those who need it.

As the professional and standard setting bodies for occupational medicine, with the core objective of protecting and improving workers' health, the Society and Faculty of Occupational Medicine see this government initiative as a positive move towards enhanced access to occupational health support for workers. We applaud its aim of reducing sickness absence, which, if left unaddressed, can lead to long term absence and ultimately loss of employment; this is detrimental not only to the health and wellbeing of the individual but also to the national economy.

In order to operate effectively the new service must be run by appropriately trained and qualified professionals and adhere to high standards of practice. To ensure this, we would strongly recommend that the organisation(s) which is/are awarded the contract(s) for the Health and Work Service should be SEQOHS accredited. SEQOHS (Safe Effective Quality Occupational Health Service) is a voluntary accreditation system for occupational health services; it is recognised as the industry standard for occupational health, with approximately three quarters of occupational health services in the UK now signed up to become accredited. Further information is available from: www.seqohs.org

We appreciate that there will be a number of different elements to the Health and Work Service which will include telephone and web-based advice; it is imperative that appropriate standards are applied to all these elements. Those directly involved in the health assessment process should be working for a SEQOHS accredited provider, have specialist occupational health training and should be able to refer cases to senior

occupational health professionals and specialists. The advice on the web site should be approved by a qualified occupational health professional and regularly reviewed against evidence based guidelines. We would expect the telephone advice line to be run according to protocols and training devised by appropriately qualified professionals, and that the call operators should have access to senior occupational health professionals and specialists when needed. Given the tiered structure of the service, we also recommend that both the individual elements and also the service as a whole are reviewed regularly to ensure standards are being adhered to and that the end-to-end system, for those workers passing between tiers, works effectively in supporting workers back to work where this is possible.

Conclusion

The Society and the Faculty of Occupational Medicine are committed to assisting the government with a view to ensuring high standards of occupational health practice in the new Health and Work Service, and would be pleased to discuss this further with the parties concerned.

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Notes

The Society and Faculty of Occupational Medicine are the two leading bodies in the UK for occupational medicine and health.

Further information at: www.som.org.uk and www.fom.ac.uk

The two are in discussions about forming together a single organisation for occupational health. Further information at: <http://singleorg.co.uk/wordpress/>

Further information on SEQOHS at: www.seqohs.org . SEQOHS requires those accredited to adhere to a set of standards which include requirements for: qualifications and training, ethical standards of behaviour, confidentiality and security of clinical records, clinical governance, the safety of medical equipment, standards of facilities and hygiene, access to specialist advice and promoting a culture of equality. A review of the standards will be conducted during 2014, in consultation with stakeholders, and this will be considering whether new elements should be introduced, such as a commitment to training for the new generation of professionals, clinical leadership and the provision of needs assessments.

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