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Faculty of Occupational Medicine

GP access to occupational health services

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NHS England's decision to place the funding burden of occupational health support onto employers is dangerous and puts GPs' health at risk. One of the strengths of specialist occupational health provision is that a pre-emptive consultation can avert weeks or months of possible ill-health and associated sickness absence.

Studies show that GPs are reporting increasing mental exhaustion and as many as one third have indicated that they expect to take time off work due to burnout within the next 12 months¹.

GPs who are off work, or under-performing owing to work-related health problems, need access to specialist OH care; what specialist OH brings to the consulting room is expertise which covers physical and mental health, knowledge of the work-health interface, the law and HR. The GP with health problems needs all these aspects considering holistically, if he/she is to make a successful return to work and return to good health. To reduce access to services, at a time when GP practices are being asked to do more with no extra funding, seems a short-sighted decision that will ultimately prove more expensive for the NHS in the long run.

The Faculty continues to promote the importance of a healthy medical workforce, through our Health for Health Professionals training programme, which offers enhanced competencies to ensure that occupational health providers are well placed to offer the support that is required. Early and confidential access to advice can help to avert serious performance issues as well as adding value through reduced stress-related sickness absence.

Health for Health Professionals lead, Dr Debbie Cohen, said

"The Faculty is committed to providing training for specialists who treat doctors on a daily basis. As a former GP I am alarmed by the prospect of colleagues not being able to access specialist support when required."

¹ <http://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/home/battling-burnout/burnout-forces-almost-10-of-gps-to-take-time-off-work-as-pressure-on-occupational-health-services-grows/20005155.article#.UvTvhrQdjV4>