



THE SOCIETY OF OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE

The Faculty and Society of Occupational Medicine respond to the Government's Sickness Absence Review

The Society of Occupational Medicine and Faculty of Occupational Medicine joined forces today to welcome the findings of the Government's review into the sickness absence system. The independent review which was undertaken by Dame Carol Black, the Government's national director for health and work and David Frost, the chairman of the British Chambers of Commerce, found that with the help of specialist support, more people could return to work.

Occupational health doctors know that for most people, work is a key factor in their self-worth, family esteem and identity – yet too many people are not helped quickly enough when they become sick. The fact that for most people work is good for them is still not recognised by many people.

The Review has recommended that people who are off sick for more than four weeks should no longer be signed off by GPs but should be seen by an independent assessment service. The Society and Faculty of Occupational Medicine believe that this service should include access to occupational health specialists who are trained to assist people back into the workplace.

“GPs alone cannot be expected to reduce employee absence due to ill health” said Dr Henry Goodall, President of the Society of Occupational Medicine “Occupational health doctors are specialist doctors who are trained to work with employees and employers to rehabilitate people back into work. Just as a GP can refer their patients with other health problems to expert services – they should be able to refer to an occupational health specialist. At present, many people who are out of work for several months, through illness, have a much reduced chance of returning to work. Research shows that many who remain sick for 7-8 months may never work again. Early intervention is the key. This assessment service could provide the support GPs and their patients need.”

“We need to create a common understanding of the positive links between work and health and create a real culture shift.” said Dr Olivia Carlton, President of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine. “Too many people believe they can't work, when with the right range of help and support they can. This new assessment service could be the solution – particularly for the vast majority of workers who don't have access to occupational health services through their employer.”

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