



MEDIGOLD
HEALTH

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH: BACK TO BASICS

Occupational Health
Awareness Week

18 - 24 September 2023

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Occupational Health Awareness Week (18 – 24 September 2023) is a campaign led by the Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) and the Commercial Occupational Health Provider's Association (COHPA) to raise awareness of the role of occupational health (OH) and the value it brings for employers, individuals and society as a whole.

The theme for OHAW 2023 is the importance of occupational health for small and medium-sized businesses.

SMEs are currently five times less likely than large businesses to have OH support in place, and they and their people are therefore missing out on the significant benefits it offers.

We want to help spread the message about what occupational health is and why investing in employee health and wellbeing makes sense for SMEs, and so we've put together this handy 'Back to Basics' guide answering some of the most frequently asked questions we get about OH from smaller businesses we work with.

We hope you find it useful!

WHAT IS OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH (AND WHAT IS IT NOT)?

At its most basic level, occupational health (OH) is about the inter-relationship between health and work and how each affects the other. Occupational health service providers help companies to look after their people from recruitment right through to retirement. They provide independent, impartial advice and support to employers to help them reduce health and safety risks within their organisation, prevent and manage ill health, injury and absence, and protect and enhance the health and wellbeing of their employees through education and health promotion activities.

While occupational health can incorporate therapeutic and preventative care (for example, counselling services, physiotherapy and health screening), it is not a primary care service and OH practitioners cannot diagnose illness or prescribe or administer medical treatment.

OH clinicians are also not able to make decisions for employers. They act in an advisory capacity, aiming to equip employers and managers with the information they need to be able to make informed decisions about how to most effectively support the health of their employees while remaining compliant with their legal and statutory obligations.



To learn more about the vast range of services that occupational health covers, [click here](#).

WHY IS OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH IMPORTANT?

By law, employers have a duty of care to ensure the health and safety of their employees and protect them, as far as possible, from any risks to their wellbeing arising from the work that they do or the environment that they work in. But aside from the legal obligations and it simply being the right thing to do, looking after the health of your workforce can deliver invaluable benefits for your organisation.

In an ever more competitive labour market where people are increasingly demanding more from their employers, demonstrating that you value your staff and are committed to investing in their wellbeing can help to boost your company's reputation, marking you out as an employer of choice and helping you to attract and retain the best talent.

Taking care of your people also just makes good business sense, particularly for SMEs whose workers tend to perform multiple functions and who will therefore feel the impact of any employee absence more acutely than larger organisations with more resources to draw on. Employees who are fit, healthy and well and who are provided with the right support are less likely to go off sick, are able to perform better and are more motivated to help your business succeed. Together, this can help you to reduce absence costs, drive engagement and productivity and boost your bottom line.

Research shows that two out of three sickness absences could be prevented with occupational health interventions.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND EMPLOYEE WELLBEING?

The main difference between occupational health and employee wellbeing is that occupational health tends to be more medically focused, centring on reducing the risk of a person's work impacting on their health and vice versa by preventing and managing ill health and injury and ensuring compliance with workplace health legislation. Meanwhile, employee wellbeing services are concerned more with positively enhancing employee health and happiness rather than simply resolving or preventing problems and tend to be more holistic in their scope. They take into account how the workplace as a whole (including the physical environment and culture), as well as challenges outside work, can affect an employee's sense of wellbeing and provide solutions that help employers to support their people effectively, so that they can consistently feel and perform at their best irrespective of whether or not they have a health condition, disability or injury.

However, with health and wellbeing being so closely interlinked and each greatly influencing the other, it is essential for any organisation looking to take better care of their employees and sustain their business success to consider both. That's why many occupational health providers, like Medigold Health, are increasingly offering workplace wellbeing solutions to complement the core OH services they deliver to their clients.



WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN OHA AND AN OHP?

OHAs (Occupational Health Advisors) are qualified, registered nurses who have (or are working towards) a postgraduate degree or diploma in Occupational Health. OHPs (Occupational Health Physicians) are qualified registered doctors who have undertaken additional specialty training to become a specialist in Occupational Medicine. The difference between them is that OHPs have a higher level of expertise than OHAs due to their more extensive training.

Both OHAs and OHPs have a sound background clinical knowledge of health and disease and combine this with their knowledge of both employment law, workplace hazards and how these interact with people's health to provide employers with advice on how to keep their people safe, healthy and well at work.



WHAT IS A NEW STARTER HEALTH SCREEN?

Sometimes referred to as preplacement, pre-employment or post-offer health screening, new starter health screening offers a quick and efficient means of ensuring that newly recruited employees are medically fit to fulfil the duties and responsibilities of the role they have been offered and that the work they will be doing will not have an adverse effect on their health. It can also help employers to make reasonable adjustments as required by the Equality Act 2010.

The screening process - which involves the candidate completing an online health questionnaire that is then reviewed by an occupational health clinician - is designed to facilitate open conversations between employees and their new employer, to ensure that any disabilities, pre-existing or historic health conditions or other health risks are taken into consideration and that any required support or adjustments are in place from the outset. It is also a great tool for helping to prevent future sickness absence as it ensures management are made aware of often otherwise unnoticeable health conditions, which may change unexpectedly and result in absence issues. This means that they can better support employees to manage their conditions proactively and avoid the likelihood of problems developing further down the line.

New starter health screens should be completed after an offer of employment has been made but before the candidate commences their new role.



WHAT IS A MANAGEMENT REFERRAL?

Sometimes referred to as a sickness absence management referral, occupational health referral or occupational health assessment, a management referral is when an employer refers an employee to an occupational health service for an assessment, usually following a period of ill health or sickness absence or because an existing health condition has started to impact on their performance or attendance at work.

Management referral assessments are undertaken by either an Occupational Health Advisor (OHA) or an Occupational Health Physician (OHP) and can be conducted remotely (via telephone or video consultation) or face to face.

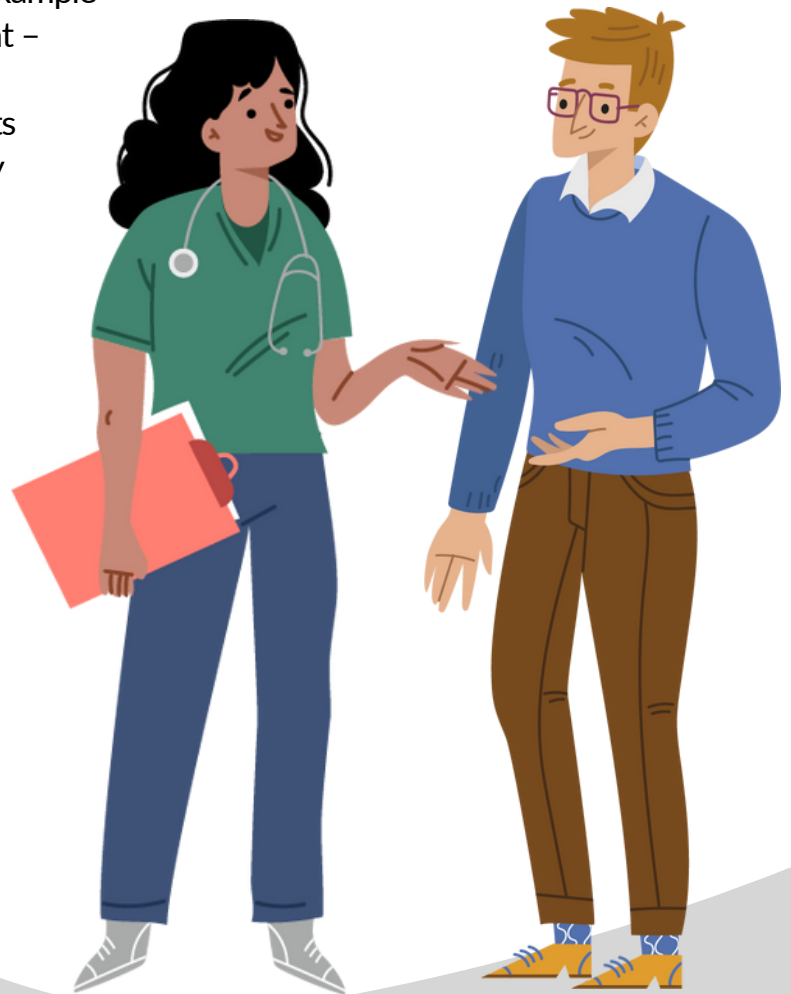
During the consultation, the clinician will discuss the information contained in the referral with the employee and ask them questions about their medical history, job role and how their current health issues are impacting on them at work. Following the assessment, they will produce a report to the employer outlining any underlying health issues or other factors at play and providing advice and recommendations on how they can support the employee safely back to work and full performance, so that they can continue making an effective contribution to the workplace. These recommendations may include implementing reasonable adjustments, such as making changes to shift patterns or working hours, arranging alternative duties, or providing additional support or assistive equipment.



DO EMPLOYERS HAVE TO FOLLOW THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN AN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH REPORT?

Occupational health clinicians are highly specialised and experienced and have an in-depth knowledge of both occupational diseases, hazards and safety critical requirements and of employment legislation and its application. They utilise this knowledge, as well as their understanding of the commercial realities of operating a business, to provide organisations with robust advice and help them find effective solutions that balance the needs of both employer and employee.

However, they act in an advisory capacity only, and any recommendations they provide in a report, for example surrounding reasonable adjustments, are just that – advisory. It is up to the employer to determine whether they can accommodate any adjustments that the OH clinician recommends and how they act on the advice provided.



WHAT HAPPENS IF AN EMPLOYEE REFUSES TO ATTEND A REFERRAL ASSESSMENT OR WITHDRAWS THEIR CONSENT FOR THEIR OH REPORT TO BE RELEASED TO MANAGEMENT?

Management referrals are a consent-led process and employees can withdraw their consent to proceed at any time, even if they initially agreed to being referred or have already attended an assessment. Occupational Health cannot share any information with management without an employee's consent. Whether they refuse to be seen at all or withdraw their consent for their OH report to be released to management after an appointment, our advice would therefore be the same: that the employer should explain to the employee that in the absence of a report, they will have to base any decisions regarding their future employment on the information available, without the benefit of occupational health advice.

To avoid such situations arising, we always recommend that employers adopt a transparent approach when referring employees. Ensuring that they are involved and engaged in the process throughout, clearly understand the reasons for the referral and are aware of any information that will be shared with occupational health and any questions that will be asked. This will help to ensure that both parties are clear on the purpose of the referral and that the employee feels supported and will hopefully result in a more positive experience for all.



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Get in touch and start protecting your business today

Medigold Health Protect is our dedicated occupational health and wellbeing support package for SMEs. To learn more about how it can help you to start looking after your people better today get in touch with our friendly team:

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