

Tips for Purchasing Occupational Health Services

Which services do occupational health services provide?

Occupational health (OH) services are sources of specialist health care staff that provide organisational and individual advice on all aspects of health and work. They provide statutory health surveillance, opinions on fitness for work and rehabilitation, advice on legal compliance both in relation to health and safety legislation and the Disability Discrimination Act.

A full list of the range of provisions can be accessed at Society of Occupational Medicine.

Accreditation of occupational health services ¹

Safe, Effective, Quality Occupational Health Service (SEQOHS) accreditation is a voluntary accreditation system for occupational health services which works to standards set by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine. Business probity, information governance, people, facilities and equipment, and relationships with purchasers and workers are contained within these standards.

Before you ring

1. Know your health risks

- Identify the health risks in your company.
- Know your current control measures for these health hazards.
- Know how many employees are potentially exposed.

2. Know what type of statutory health surveillance your business may require

Further guidance on health surveillance for exposure to noise, vibration, silica, metal working fluids, welding fume, construction, skin and respiratory hazards etc. can be accessed via <http://www.hse.gov.uk/health-surveillance/index.htm> and also at the link to HSE, COSHH Essentials – COSHH e-tool : <http://www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/essentials/index.htm>

¹Employers responsibilities are also described in SEQOHS

3. When contacting an occupational health provider

- Ask about their experience relevant to your business.
- Obtain references from other companies/contracts the OH provider has worked for.
- Ask about competencies to undertake this service and if they have SEQOHS accreditation.
- Ideally, registered medical practitioners holding a licence to practise should be Members of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (MFOM) or have a Diploma in Occupational Medicine (DOccMed) or the equivalent and be on the specialist register of the General Medical Council (GMC). Nurses should be registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and have a certificate, diploma or degree in Occupational Health or the equivalent and ideally be on the specialist part of the NMC register - Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN). Ask for their personal identification number (PIN for nurses and registration number for doctors) and confirm it online with the GMC for doctors and the NMC for nurses (See para 9 below).
- Ask about evidence of specific competency/qualifications to complete some of the more specific health surveillance, for example for noise, vibration and respiratory surveillance.

4. Consider the level of service you require

- Do you require the OH provider to do a site visit to understand the issues in your business before and after a contract is agreed?
- Do you intend to provide on-site facilities for the provider to operate from or require them to provide these off-site in their own premises?
- Do you wish the OH provider to be involved in workplace assessments, providing advice on health hazards, COSHH risk assessments and guidance on control measures?
- How often do you require health surveillance to be undertaken?
- Do you wish the OH provider to participate in absence management review, and at what stage of the process would you like their input?
- What feedback from the provider do you require to assist with the management of your employees?
- What other services would you require from the occupational health provider, for example fitness for task, safety critical work assessments?
- Do you need access to medical review officers for the purpose of drug and alcohol testing?

5. What should the occupational health provider supply me with?

- Clear information on fees.
- Systems for the maintenance of occupational health clinical records and information on the findings on statutory surveillance to enable the creation of statutory health records.
- Assurance that systems are in place to protect employee confidentiality.
- Evidence of calibrated and well maintained medical equipment relevant to the service agreed.
- The appropriate number of staff and skills mix for the service they are contracted to deliver.
- If appropriate, anonymous trend information which you can discuss with your employee representatives and use to review risk assessments.

6. Know what type of statutory health surveillance your business may require

- The fees for the service to be provided.
- The service the OH Provider is to deliver, this should be completed at the outset and at each contract review.
- The resources required to deliver the service including, if relevant, the provision of adequate premises and facilities.
- The process for referrals to Occupational Health and their case management.
- The process for reporting cases of occupational disease and referral for further investigations.
- The communication pathways between you and the OH provider: what information do you agree to provide OH with (job specification, risk assessments etc.) and what information does OH agree to supply to enable you to manage your employees (e.g. fitness for work and grouped anonymous data).
- Arrangements for retaining medical in confidence information and providing you with information for statutory health record.
- Ongoing understanding of the business's hazards, risk processes and controls.

7. What should be included in the contract I have with the occupational health provider?

- The service level agreement including turn-around times for referrals

- The number of sessions/hours to be provided
- The resources required to deliver the service
- The referral process to occupational health provider
- The number of site visits
- The number of qualified staff required to deliver the service
- The competencies of the staff
- The timeliness and nature of the feedback from the OH provider
- The involvement in workplace visits and the risk assessment process
- Arrangements for review/complaints procedures etc.

8. How do I contact an occupational health provider?

- Yellow pages
- Internet search engines
- Professional bodies and organisations e.g.:
 - Commercial Occupational Health Providers Association (COHPA) Phone: 0333 772 0401
 - Society of Occupational Medicine Phone: 02074862641 or www.som.org.uk

9. How many occupational health providers should I contact?

Ideally obtain two or three quotes from different occupational health providers. In addition, it is advisable to request the contact details of other similar companies to which the provider has delivered an OH service so that you can obtain references.

For more information:

The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, (HSENI): accessed at <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/contact>

Telephone: 0800 0320 121; email: mail@hseni.gov.uk; website: www.hseni.gov.uk

General Medical Council: accessed at: www.gmc-uk.org/ - enables a check on registration and on speciality registration

Nursing and Midwifery Council: accessed at: www.nmc.org.uk/ - enables a check on registration and on speciality qualification

SEQOHS: accessed at www.seqohs.org/ - describes standards for occupational health services