

Healthy Work Matters

the newsletter of the Sheffield Occupational Health Development Group

What is Occupational Health?

We hear a lot about Occupational Health, but many people don't have a clear idea of what it actually is. We thought a good starting point for our newsletter would be to try and define what we mean by Occupational Health.

Stated simply, occupational health is activity that ensures:

- work does not adversely affect people's health
- the impact of ill health on work is appropriately managed.

If done properly, occupational health will protect the health of people at work, thereby protecting the health of the business. Indirectly it also improves the health of the community and the nation. Therefore, occupational health is everyone's business (employers, employees, government and unions) and not just HSE and health care professionals.

A good occupational health practice involves occupational health providers working with companies to



develop services that are focused on the needs of the business and the work force, and are relevant to the hazards and risks arising from the work activities. Occupational health is not about the provision of general practice in the workplace, nor is it about unfocused general health promotion in the workplace... what is the point of banning chips from the canteen if employees are being poisoned on the shop floor?! Similarly, occupational health services are not a tool for management to 'hire and fire', even when the company is paying for the service. A professional occupational health service is independent and

gives unbiased advice to both management and the work force.

Most occupational health providers are doctors or nurses with specialist qualifications. They should work closely with occupational hygienists, ergonomists, health and safety officers, employers, managers and the work force.

Occupational health providers should seek to work with both the employer and the work force to promote the health of people at work. By creating a healthier workplace with healthy workers, the financial burden of ill health is minimised and creates a healthier business.

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Welcome to the first issue of *Healthy Work Matters*, the newsletter of the Sheffield Occupational Health Development Group. Various organisations are represented in the Group including The Health Authority, industry, Health and Safety Executive (HSE) / Health and Safety Laboratory (HSL), Primary Care Groups (GPs), Universities, NHS and Trade Unions.

The purpose of our free, quarterly newsletter is to promote occupational health in Sheffield. In this issue, we ask the question 'What is Occupational Health?', we describe occupational health awareness in Sheffield companies and we report on the launch of the National Occupational Health Strategy for Great Britain.

In addition to the newsletter we also support a quarterly Network Meeting, which is a forum for open discussion between parties with an interest in occupational health, not forgetting a free lunch! Our next meeting is scheduled for January, and the topic is stress at work: more details will follow in the next issue. The Group also holds an annual conference, which is advertised elsewhere in this issue.

We welcome any feedback you may have and we hope you find this and future copies of *Healthy Work Matters* informative and useful.

Lisa Allan

Sheffield Occupational Health Development Group - Who are they?

The Group has fourteen members drawn from various organisations within Sheffield who have an interest in Occupational Health.

- Dr Frada Eskin (Chair)** - Deputy Director of Public Health
- Chris Linacre** - Director of Corporate Development, Royal Hallamshire Hospital
- Dr Frank Gallagher** - Employment Medical Advisory Service, HSE
- Dr Alison Rimmer** - Consultant Occupational Health Physician, Northern General Hospital
- Dr David Fishwick** - Senior Lecturer and Consultant in Respiratory Medicine
- Dr Andrew Curran** - Head, Health Effects Section, HSL
- Simon Pickvance** - Sheffield Occupational Health Advisory Service
- Morag Maddocks** - Consultant Organisational Psychologist, Community Health Sheffield
- Lisa Bradshaw** - Specialist Research Nurse
- Tracey Priestly** - Senior Occupational Health Nurse, Sheffield City Council
- Dr Henry Prempeh** - Specialist Registrar in Public Health Medicine, Sheffield Health
- John Herbert** - Head, Health and Safety Environment, EEF, Sheffield Association
- Mark Gamsu** - Healthy Sheffield Coordination, Sheffield City Council
- Dr Paul Harvey** - GP, Devonshire Medical Centre

A new face for Occupational Health in Sheffield



Lisa Allan has been appointed as Project Manager to facilitate a number of key occupational health initiatives. Lisa's post is funded by HSE and she is based at HSL. She is charged with increasing occupational health awareness across the City by 10% over three years. This will be achieved through a number of key activities including collection and dissemination of information, training and the identification of research and development opportunities.

If you would like more information on the work of the Group, the newsletter or the annual conference, please contact her on:

email: lisa.allan@hsl.gov.uk

Tel: 0114 2892679

Fax: 0114 2892768

Survey shows we have a long way to go!

The Sheffield Occupational Health Development Group has undertaken research, funded by HSE, to assess occupational health awareness in companies across the city. This study has shown that we have a considerable amount to do to convince industry of the benefits of occupational health. Only 8% of the managers contacted agreed to take part in the study (28 out of 341 contacts). Those that did take part were interviewed for approximately 40 minutes, during which time a great deal of information was collected. Amongst other data:

- 42% of companies did not have a written health and safety policy.
- 14% employed the services of a part-time occupational health physician, 7% employed a health and safety advisor and 11% employed a part-time occupational health nurse. Only one manager was aware of the qualifications of the health care staff employed within the company.
- 67% of enterprises thought that a doctor or nurse would be the best person to provide an occupational health service. They were perceived as being "professional" and "would understand how to monitor health". It was also felt that they would have "background knowledge" and would be able "to look after the individual".
- 28% of the companies carried out some form of pre-employment screening.
- 8 enterprises provided occupational health advice in the form of leaflets, posters or videos.

This study has demonstrated that whilst safety is perceived as an important issue, occupational health is poorly understood and not considered a high priority. We hope that implementing the Sheffield Occupational Health Strategy will improve this situation over the next few years, and Sheffield City will become a leader in health work matters.

This work was conducted by Lisa Bradshaw on behalf of the Sheffield Occupational Health Development Group.



Government launches Occupational Health strategy for the UK

On 5 July 2000, HSE launched the occupational health strategy for Great Britain in the presence of Ministers, Health and Safety Commissioners and more than 200 invited guests including members of the Sheffield Occupational Health Development Group.

The strategy aims to reduce occupational ill health by 20% over the next 10 years, but HSE accepts that it will not achieve this target alone. Therefore, Government Departments, local health authorities and a range of external stakeholders (large and small firms, trade unions and health

care professionals) have agreed to work in partnership. The work of the strategy will be facilitated by a Partnership Board, chaired by Bill Callaghan, Chair HSC, that will report to Ministers.

For a copy of the strategy, please visit the web site (www.ohstrategy.net)





Wednesday 1 November 2000 - Sheffield United Football Ground

The Occupational Health Strategy for Great Britain, launched on 5 July 2000, recognises the need to take a wide view of occupational health, tackling the effects of work on health and also the effects of health on work. The objective of this one day conference will be to discuss options which will enable the targets identified in the Occupational Health Strategy for Great Britain to be realised at the local level.

Representatives from HSE will describe the national Occupational Health strategy and local stakeholders from industry, trade unions, primary care and research will discuss occupational health and what are the implications of the national strategy. With keynote addresses from:

- **Bill Callaghan, Chair Health and Safety Commission**
Occupational Health Strategy for Great Britain

- **Bob Baty, Chief Executive, South West Water**
Business benefits of Occupational Health - Clearwater 2010

Registration Form:

Name:

Position:

Company:

Address:

Tel:

Fax:

email:

The cost including delegate pack, tea/coffee, buffet lunch and VAT is £60.00. Payment must accompany booking. Numbers attending this conference will be limited so an early booking is advised.

Please make cheques payable to: **Health and Safety Laboratory**

and send to: **Rebecca Mason**
Health and Safety Laboratory
Broad Lane
Sheffield S3 7HQ

Confirmation of bookings will follow receipt of payment.

For information on company stalls, please contact Rebecca Mason on 0114 2892716