

10 Top Tips for Purchasing Occupational Health Services

Before you pick up the phone.....

1. Know your Health Hazards

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

2. Know what type of Health Surveillance your business may require

- Further guidance on health surveillance for noise, vibration, silica, metal working fluids, construction, skin and respiratory hazards etc can be sought from our website www.hse.gov.uk and also www.coshhessentials.co.uk.

3. Contacting an Occupational Health Provider

- What experience do they have relevant to your business?
Obtain references from other companies/contracts the OH provider has worked for.
- What competencies do they have to undertake this service?
Ideally Doctors should be Members of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (MFOM) or have a Diploma in Occupational Medicine (DOccMed) and Nurses should be registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and have a certificate, diploma or degree in Occupational Health and ideally be on the specialist part of the NMC register. Ask for their personal identification number (PIN) and confirm it and their qualifications with the NMC.
- What additional qualifications do they have to complete some of the more specific health surveillance?
For example on Noise, Vibration and Respiratory Surveillance.

4. Consider what 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 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.
- Would you prefer the provider to conduct the health surveillance procedures at your workplace, or for your employees to attend the providers' premises?

5. What should the Occupational Health Provider supply me with?

- Clear and user friendly information on fees.
- Maintenance of adequate occupational health clinical records on your employees.
- Implement and comply with systems to protect employee confidentiality.
- Provide calibrated and well maintained medical equipment relevant to the service agreed.
- Provide the appropriate number of staff and skills mix for the service they are contracted to deliver.
- Fitness to work information to allow you to keep health records.
- Anonymous trend information which you can discuss with your employee representatives and use to review risk assessments.

6. What should I agree with the Occupational Health Provider before a contract is arranged

- 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.
- 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.
- 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
- The number of sessions/ hours to be provided
- The resources required to deliver the service
- The referral process to Occupational Health
- 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.

8. How do I contact an Occupational Health Provider

You can obtain contact details for Occupational Health Providers from:-

- Safe and Healthy Working (0800 0192211)
- Your local NHS Trust
- Yellow pages
- Internet search engines
- Professional bodies and organisations e.g.:
 - Commercial Occupational Health Providers Association (COHPA) 01933-232373
 - SOM (Society of Occupational Medicine) 02074862641 or www.som.org.uk
 - www.nhsplus.nhs.uk

9. How many Occupational Health Providers should I contact

- If you have the time it would be worth obtaining 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.

10. Be Prepared..... Be an Intelligent Customer!