

Elements of an Occupational Healthcare Program

An Occupational Healthcare Program (OHCP) is a critical element of a safety management system (SMS). OHCPs focus on the prevention, early detection, and diagnosis and treatment of occupational injuries and illnesses. Below are some details of the elements of an OHCP.



HEALTHFUL WORKFORCE

Organizations implementing an SMS must ensure resources are available to provide effective occupational health (OH) services. Organizations without internal OH staff will need to secure external OH services. The OH team should coordinate with safety and health (S&H) personnel to identify and effectively manage OH risks. OH and S&H must work together to anticipate and control hazardous conditions posing health risks to be effective at maintaining a healthful workforce.

EXAMINATIONS

Monitoring the health of employees is one of the functions of the OHCP. OH covers the full spectrum of work-related medical examinations, including pre-placement exams, preventive medical surveillance, and exit examinations. Through these examinations, OH professionals ensure employees are fit for duty, monitor employees' health status during employment, determine the need for work adjustments, and document the status of workers' health at termination of employment. Examinations are vital, especially in work environments where stressors such as physical (e.g., noise, temperature, radiation), chemical, biological, and ergonomic hazards exist.

DIAGNOSES AND MEDICAL TREATMENT

When employees have been exposed to health hazards, the OH team works with other subject matter experts, such as S&H staff, to ensure accurate diagnoses based on employee exposure. Your organization must be able to provide immediate medical treatment in the event of an emergency. If your organization depends on OH staff to serve as first responders, you must ensure OH is part of your emergency drills and procedures, and has the necessary equipment to respond in the event of an emergency. Additionally, if your organization depends on external emergency responders, the OH team should be involved in collaboration with external emergency support personnel.

CASE MANAGEMENT

Case management focuses on providing various services to support an employee from the time an employee experiences an injury or illness until the employee returns to work. Effective case management requires comprehensive written policies. These policies should require employees to immediately report unhealthful conditions, injuries, and symptoms of illnesses. Additionally, the policies should include your return to work process. Collaborating with other key stakeholders, such as S&H Staff, helps ensure your organization maintains accurate documentation (e.g., medical records, OSHA Forms 300/300A, investigation results, Safety Data Sheets), and helps to reviews trends to support the prevention of workplace injuries and illnesses.

IMMUNIZATIONS

In some organizations, OH professionals must provide immunizations to employees. These immunizations may range from seasonal influenza vaccinations to tetanus, tuberculosis, hepatitis B, or other immunizations employees may need prior to performing a specific job or working in certain geographical locations. OSHA requires some organizations, especially those organizations falling under the healthcare industry, to provide testing and immunizations for diseases such as hepatitis B and tuberculosis.



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TRAINING, AWARENESS & PROMOTION

Many organizations rely on OH staff to provide training on topics such as hearing conservation, radiation, and other safety-related topics with potential to cause chronic illnesses. Employee health can also be impacted by off-the-job factors beyond the employer's control. You can and should *influence* employees' off-the-job behaviors by establishing voluntary health and wellness programs addressing issues such as physical fitness, nutrition, smoking, addiction, family planning, mental health, domestic violence, etc.

Effective communications with key stakeholders such as medical and emergency response service providers, S&H staff, and, at appropriate times, the media, are critical for an effective OHCP. OH staff should consider conducting periodic surveys or meetings with key stakeholders to identify their communication needs, perceptions of OH program effectiveness, and ideas for improvement.

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website at: <https://www.smcx.org/>.



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