

Health and work update for clients as at 4th December 2023

PROMOTING, PROTECTING AND SUPPORTING HEALTH IN WORK

1. Protecting health at work - HSE statistics for 2023

The Health and Safety Executive have just published their statistics for 2023¹. Headline figures are:

- 1.8 million working people suffering from a work-related illness, of which:
 - 875,000 workers suffering work-related stress, depression or anxiety
 - 473,000 workers suffering from a work-related musculoskeletal disorder
- 2,268 mesothelioma deaths due to past asbestos exposures (2021)
- 135 workers killed in work-related accidents
- 561,000 working people sustained an injury at work according to the Labour Force Survey
- 60,645 injuries to employees reported under RIDDOR
- 35.2 million working days lost due to work-related illness and workplace injury
- £20.7 billion estimated cost of injuries and ill health from current working conditions (2021/22)

2. The role of occupational health services in protecting health at work

HSE provides guidance on how occupational health services can advise employers in meeting their legal duties to prevent physical and mental ill health in the workforce, and how work and the work environment can impact on workers' health, both physical and mental. HSE also remind employers of what they must do to make sure workers' health is not adversely affected by their work and that workers are medically fit to carry out their work safely.

An important element of what we do includes occupational health needs analysis for the organisation as a whole. We also provide assessments of fitness for work for individual employees in safety critical roles and/or hazardous environments, and health surveillance of those exposed to particular hazards. Analysis of health surveillance informs the employer's periodic review of the effectiveness of controls, and at an individual employee level provides early warning of health effects developing. We are grateful for managers ensuring that their team members attend; employees are required to attend².

HSE also note that occupational health services advise on how workers' health can affect their ability to do their job. Commonly we provide advice on how an individual worker's health might impact on their capacity for their work following management referral. We will often advise on adjustments, particularly if the employee has an impairment that is likely to give rise to a disability.

We also commonly see individual employees referred with workplace stress, or who have work related injuries. We will consult with the employer where trends are emerging. We can also provide training for managers in how they can support mental health in work. HSE³ and ACAS⁴ also provide guidance.

¹ HSE vital statistics for 2023 at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overview.htm>

² HSE guidance on health surveillance at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/health-surveillance/overview.htm>

³ HSE guidance on supporting mental health in work at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/>

⁴ ACAS guidance on supporting mental health at work at: <https://www.acas.org.uk/supporting-mental-health-workplace>

3. Assurance of quality and value of occupational health service delivery

The Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) runs Safe Effective Quality Occupational Health Service (SEQOHS). SEQOHS accreditation is voluntary, there being no mandatory accreditation or regulation of occupational health services, other than the requirements placed on individual health professionals by their respective regulators. These include the General Medical Council for doctors, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, and the Health and Care Professions Council for physiotherapists and other allied health professionals. FOM promotes SEQOHS as the industry standard for occupational health service delivery, providing assurance for purchasers of the quality and value of accredited services.

The recent review of the SEQOHS standards is now complete, and the 2023 standards are now published on the FOM website⁵. Further information is being published in early December on the SEQOHS website. A change for 2023 has been more information for commissioners/purchasers, including specifically what services providers are accredited for.

A new development for SEQOHS 2023 is inclusion of output and outcome standards (Domain 3). New Standards 3.1 and 3.2 were developed with HSE and focus on understanding clients' occupational health needs, and acting as competent persons⁶ to assist clients meet their legal obligations to provide a safe place of work⁷.

In Cordell Health, we routinely collect feedback from managers and/or HR staff making referrals, and from the employees we see. The aim of this is to continually improve the service we provide. The requirement for feedback is incorporated into SEQOHS 2023 (Standards 3.3 and 3.4 respectively); as we ourselves will be going through the reaccreditation process early in 2024, against the new 2023 standards, we will especially value feedback from clients in the coming weeks.

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4 December 2023

⁵ SEQOHS 2023 standards at: <https://www.fom.ac.uk/document/2023-seqohs-standards>

⁶ HSE guidance on competent persons at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/involvement/competentperson.htm>

⁷ HSE guidance on occupational health services at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/health-surveillance/occupational-health/index.htm#article>