



CAREERS FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH TECHNICIANS

Occupational health professionals make a real difference to the health of workers. It is also a rewarding and interesting career. Career prospects in occupational health (OH) are excellent with a shortage of professionals in the field.

An OH Technician (OHT) is a key part of a multidisciplinary OH team. The OHT must provide accurate written, electronic and verbal reports, observing confidentiality always.

The role may involve blood pressure monitoring, phlebotomy, cholesterol and urine testing.

It often involves working on one's own initiative and may include site visits and considerable travel.

OHT backgrounds are varied and may have worked as care workers, fitness instructors, the military or emergency services.

They usually have many transferable skills such as communication, data analysis, measurements skills, record storage and an ability to work independently.

Average salaries for OH technicians are around £22,000 (following a 2018 SOM salary survey).

Roles and Responsibilities

OHTs should have appropriate training and competency assessment with qualified and competent supervisors who can provide sign-off and escalation e.g. an OH nurse or physician will remain accountable for interpreting results and determining fitness to work.

Escalation criteria advice can be provided by the SOM, as well as a sample Job Description. There have been successful prosecutions by the Health & Safety Executive for non-competent advice being provided by individuals working outside their scope of competency and without qualified supervision.

Skill development may be based on customer need. There are a variety of approaches to learning the role including in-house training, short courses and University based courses with some shared content with nurses combined with supervised practice for example. E.g. it may include Drug and Alcohol Training.

The SOM are working with education providers to develop a specific OHT course.

OH technicians should be trained and assessed as competent to:

Level 1

- Measure blood pressure, pulse, height and weight including BMI
- Do urinalysis
- Interpret new starter questionnaires*
- Audiometry
- Measure visual acuity to occupational standard
- Measure colour vision to occupational standard
- Do lung function testing to include peak flow and spirometry
- Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) Assessment to level 1 and 2
- Assess mobility
- Do drug and alcohol testing
- Keep records
- Use communication skills
- Use IT skills
- Use health and safety legislation
- Include concepts of health promotion and prevention of ill health
- Order stock
- Infection control

Level 2

- Venepuncture
- ECG
- Interpretation of tests in Level 1 and food handler questionnaires
- Chester step test
- Vaccinations (subject to 2-day course)
- Skin assessment
- Occupational health hazards and risk management.

Level 3

- Display screen equipment (DSE) assessment
- Supervision
- Risk Management
- Interpretation of lung function and audiometric results

Malpractice insurance can be provided employers, but SOM can also provide individual OHT insurance via James Hallam.

SALLY BEARDSMORE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH TECHNICIAN, HOMESERVE

I STARTED WORKING PART-TIME AS AN ADMINISTRATOR AFTER STUDYING MIDWIFERY AT UNIVERSITY. AFTER 18 MONTHS IN THE ROLE, I MOVED TO WORK FULL-TIME FOR THE GROUP SAFETY DIRECTOR AS A HEALTH & SAFETY SUPPORT OFFICER. AFTER TWO YEARS IN THE ROLE, I MOVED TO WORK AS A HEALTH TRAINER AND OFFERED MINI 'KNOW YOUR NUMBERS' HEALTH CHECKS TO ALL OUR UK STAFF. THE ROLE EXPANDED AND I BEGAN TO OFFER MORE THAN JUST HEALTH CHECKS AS I TRAINED WITH THE NHS AS A STOP SMOKING ADVISOR. HOMESERVE BROUGHT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH IN-HOUSE AND I MOVED TO WORK AS AN OH TECHNICIAN IN SEPTEMBER 2017. I'VE RECENTLY PASSED THE AUDIOMETRY AND SPIROMETRY EXAMS AND WILL BE STUDYING FOR THE NEBOSH LATER THIS YEAR.

Future career pathways could include:

- public health/health and wellbeing leading to being a wellness coach or health and wellbeing advisor
- Nurse practitioner
- Nurse
- Health and safety advisor
- Technician clinical lead
- OH manager
- Contract manager in OH