

## CHOOSING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AS A CAREER

### Information, Advice, and Guidance – updated May 2022

Occupational Health professionals make a real difference to the health of workers. Research shows that good health is good for business and better workplaces have better financial results. Occupational Health (OH) is a rewarding and interesting career - and one that allows a good work / life balance. Here is some initial advice:

- **Suzanne Douglas - Senior Staff Health Advisor (Oxfam)** - get as much practical experience as possible and to find a good mentor. Also, be prepared to do lots of research and reading!
- **Jane Williams - Occupational Health Advisor (NHS)** - read around the speciality first, get a good contemporary OH book and join relevant groups/forums. If possible, shadow another OH practitioner and read the RCN OH nurses' competencies for reference.
- **Dr Paul Davies - Occupational Health Physician (Various)** - Over the years, several practitioners have helped me shape my career and fine-tune my skills, it is important to be open minded and to let opportunities develop your interests.
- **Martin Jelfs - OH Psychotherapist (Independent)** - understand the dynamics of the organisation they are working for, as well as the conflicting pressures and demands on the staff. This helps maintain a balanced perspective.

SOM holds an annual OH Jobs and Career Fair, demonstrating its support for the next generation of OH professionals - view the recording of the 2021 Jobs and Career Fair [here](#). Presentation slides from previous events are [here](#) and [here](#) and you can view a free webinar on careers in OH [here](#). Being a member of the SOM can support your career development e.g. SOM hosts a CESR support group, support for placements and mentoring for GPs, and regular workplace visits - [contact us](#) for details. The occupational health world is friendly and there are more people than you think out there who are willing to help and support you. Whatever your background or interests, there is a career in occupational health that's perfect for you!

Career prospects in Occupational Health (OH) are excellent with a shortage of professionals in the field. OH professionals:

- Advise on the effects of work on health and health on work
- Contribute to workplace policy development
- Visit workplaces to advise on health
- Assess the fitness of employees to undertake specific tasks
- Recommend relevant adjustments that may be required in the workplace to support people with disabilities to undertake their job role
- Monitor the health of employees by undertaking ongoing health surveillance and health monitoring, particularly for employees who work with certain chemicals, materials and could be exposed to noise or vibration because of work processes
- Assess individual cases of injuries and illnesses and develop return to work strategies

- Provide training to organisations and their managers on how to make the best from OH Services
- Engage with organisations to assess the effectiveness of delivery of OH Services and look for ways to bridge gaps between business needs and OH provision
- They also understand employment and anti-discrimination legislation as well as environmental and health and safety law.

Work should be seen as a health outcome. Employment and health form a virtuous circle: suitable work can be good for your health, and good health means that you are more likely to be, and stay, employed. OH teams collaborate with managers and human resource personnel to help to keep people well at work – physically and mentally. If there are problems, either with the workplace or with an employee's fitness, the OH professional's role is to advise on adjustments to the workplace, and / or to give appropriate advice and support to the employee. OH professionals assess employees who are injured or become ill at work by:

- Providing advice on health education, health and safety and sickness absence
- Conducting risk assessments in conjunction with the health and safety team
- Managing employee health records and statistics.

They may work alone or as part of a team of health experts. They may work in a large organisation (like a hospital, local authority, the military), or for a private OH firm used by smaller employers. They may also set up their own OH business or become a self-employed. With experience, there are opportunities to progress to a management position, leading a team of OH staff, running an OH Centre or sitting on a board advising on the integration of employee wellbeing into the overall business strategy.

The OH role is not always about keeping people in work. Sometimes there is a place for open and frank conversations when workers are not fit to return to aspects of a particular role or environment, permanently or for the near future. Supporting employers to follow capability proceedings and redeploy or dismiss / retire a worker on grounds of ill-health capability can add value. Although an upsetting situation at the time employees often express gratitude for the support provided by OH later.

## 2. Career Vignettes

**Clare Haddow – Occupational Health Advisor** - Having newly qualified as a nurse I worked as a school nurse at Dulwich College, it was the first time I thought about people at work and their jobs. This was the catalyst for me decide to study my Occupational Health Nursing Certificate at Manchester Polytechnic. My husband decided to do an MBA at the London Business School, so adapted my OH skills to work as a housemistress for a Kent Boarding school while giving us a roof over our head, as my husband studied. The Headmaster recognised my OH qualifications and paid for me to study at Christchurch in Canterbury and I completed a Certificate in Health Education, so I could develop their Personal and Social Education program for 11-18-year-old girls. After my husband's MBA and a move north, I continued working in OH setting up a new OH service for BBC North working on a part-time basis with 6 local radio stations and 2 TV centres. My husband's job moved us from Ilkley to Bristol, and I worked for Wincanton Distribution (part-time) covering the south-west. I then realised with 3 children under 5a more local job was required. I worked part-time for BUPA Hospital in Bristol developing their OH service. We then

moved to Chile for just under 3 years and I studied with the Open University and obtained a Certificate and Diploma in Business Management and continued to study on home leave by attending OH study days and receiving the OH magazine posted to Santiago. Returning from Chile I worked for BBC Southwest (part-time) and then the Environment Agency (part-time) before going to work for a large UK bank. I left them to set up my own business to allow me to have a work-life balance with our 3 children. I now work full time for my own company with a great team of Associates and learning all the time about the OH needs of a wide range of businesses. There are so many possibilities in OH and never a dull moment. OH is a profession that allows you to adapt to life's needs and develop to where one wants to go within the profession.

**Christine Poulter – Occupational Health Advisor** - Having already spent 12 and half years in higher education, gaining nursing, midwifery, public health, and health visiting qualifications, I became fearful of the longevity of my career in health visiting, as the Government announced severe cuts and changes within that service (a decision that has since been reversed with a large recruitment campaign). Through serendipity and due to transferable skills, I was offered a role as an OH Nurse in an NHS foundation trust. The NHS sponsored my initial training, and I consolidated my learning within the NHS. As I considered it might be difficult to gain a senior managerial role without diverse experience, I left the security of my NHS role to work in manufacturing within the private sector and higher education. I then completed further studies for an MSc in Occupational Health and Management. More recently, I am combining setting up my own practice with contract work. OH is not necessarily the easy option as viewed by many of my colleagues. Even my health professional colleagues confuse the difference between Occupational Therapy and OH; such remains the lack of awareness. The role requires diverse knowledge and the ability to assist both the employee and the employer, which can sometimes be a difficult balance with conflicting interests, or put in another way, there are two sides to every story. The boundaries between advising and treating require skilful management. As reflected in all areas of medicine, case management is often complex involving personal, home-related and work-related issues. No two days are ever the same. The role is most rewarding. There is no shortage of work in this growing industry.

**Lorna Owens – Occupational Health Physiotherapist** - I started working in the field of Occupational Health in 2017, after working in the NHS in Knowsley, Merseyside for 5 years. The varied workload and new environments I work in have provided me with some great new challenges. It has been great to adapt my skills to managing an occupational caseload, getting out into the workplace, and making my assessments and rehabilitation more functional and work focussed. I have also found it beneficial to be able to link regularly with the managers at the different companies and other members of the OH team. Having this open dialogue really helps support people at work, it is a rewarding part of my role and I see this reflected in the employee outcomes. Within a short period of time, I quickly saw the benefit of OH physiotherapy for people at work. We can get expert, early advice to employees to prevent problems and support wider health and well-being, not just musculoskeletal issues. The other aspect of my role that I have really enjoyed is the prevention aspect. Within a relatively brief period, I engaged in workplace assessments, training managers, and supporting different health and well-being campaigns. This is effectively about preventing problems in the first place, something we all know that physios are very well placed to do.

**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. I have recently passed the audiometry and spirometry exams and will be studying for the NEBOSH later this year.

### **3. Qualifications needed to become an OH professional**

**Doctors** - Medical practitioners who have an interest in occupational medicine might wish to complete a Diploma in Occupational Medicine. This is designed for doctors who are working part-time in, or have an interest in, occupational medicine. It is most frequently taken by general practitioners who often add to their practice portfolio by providing OH services to local companies. There are several providers of this Diploma – look on the FOM website for details. To qualify as a specialist in occupational medicine doctors need to register with the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) and undertake a speciality training programme approved by the General Medical Council (GMC). Once successfully completed, this makes doctors eligible both for Membership of the Faculty (MFOM) and for entry to the GMC Specialist Register (AFOM or FFOM). The Society and Faculty of Occupational Medicine have produced a document outlining the benefits to an organisation of hosting a trainee. An alternative route to becoming a specialist is through a Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration application to the GMC. Doctors who have applied successfully through CESR to join the GMC Specialist Register may then apply for Membership of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine. The Society of Occupational Medicine has a support group for people going through CESR and also MFOM revision sessions. The mean average salary for OH doctors is over £120,000.

**OH Nurses** - OH nurses are probably the biggest professional group in the speciality. Registered nurses (NHS band 5) may gain employment as an occupational health nurse without any further training. Within these roles the work and promotion are likely to be limited. It is possible to undertake training whilst employed, either through the Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN), BA, BSc, PGDip, or MSc route. These courses take 1 year full-time, or 2 years part-time. Some employers do not require this and focus on “on the job” training. Educational requirements and the OH nurse career paths are currently under review by the National School of OH and the Faculty of OH Nursing. Average salaries for OH nurses are in the region of £35,000 with managerial roles earning on average £45,000.

**OH Physiotherapist** - OH Physiotherapists provide treatment and rehabilitation of work-relevant injuries (which can be provided on-site or in an off-site treatment centre), plan return to work, educate about injury prevention in the workplace, conduct health promotion, job task analysis, and advise on modifications to the role or working environment. They often have specialist knowledge of manual handling and physical ergonomics in the workplace. Average salaries are in the region of £35,000.

**Occupational Health Psychologist** - Occupational Health Psychology is the application of the science of psychology to work. Occupational Health psychologists use psychological theories and approaches to deliver tangible benefits by enhancing the effectiveness of organisations and developing the performance, motivation, and wellbeing of people in the workplace. Occupational psychologists develop, apply, and evaluate a range of tools and interventions across many different areas of the workplace, including Psychological assessment,

Learning, training and development, Wellbeing at work, Work design, organisational change and development and Leadership, motivation, and engagement. Average salaries for experienced practitioners are around £35k.

**OH Technicians** - OH technicians work as part of a team. They undertake health surveillance clinics including spirometry, audiology and vision screening. The OH nurse or Physician remain accountable for interpreting these results and determining fitness to work. The role may expand to involve blood pressure monitoring, phlebotomy, cholesterol, and urine testing. This role involves working on their own initiative and may include site visits. The OH technician must provide accurate written, electronic, and verbal reports observing confidentiality at all times. See details about self-assessment against competencies and escalation criteria for OH technicians are at <https://www.som.org.uk/som-special-interest-groups>. Average salaries for OH technicians are around £24,000.

#### 4. FAQs

**Funding?** An employer may pay for this and do look at the links at [www.gov.uk/apply-for-student-finance](http://www.gov.uk/apply-for-student-finance). For information on how to apply for student finance support in all four countries, see [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health)

There are also several scholarships such as from the SOM and the Florence Nightingale Scholarship <http://www.florence-nightingale-foundation.org.uk/content/page/33/>

**Where can I source a Practice Teacher?** Ask senior colleagues and ask if they would be willing to consider studying the Practice Teacher (PT) course (the University of Western Scotland and London South Bank University can offer support to new PTs).

**Return to study?** Programmes welcome applications from career changers. The individual universities will advise on how to prepare for study. Visit the university websites for more information.

#### 5. Where to study? (NB Correct at the time of going to press – please check courses for more detail and if they are still running)

Title of course	Duration of the course	Qualification
<b>Multidisciplinary</b>		
Middlesex University Occupational Health and Safety <a href="https://tinyurl.com/y8833ecj">https://tinyurl.com/y8833ecj</a>	1 year FT 2 years PT	MSc

<p>The course is accredited by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, which means you can become a graduate member of the institution when you complete the course and can then gain chartered membership after two years' professional development.</p>		
<p>University of Nottingham Workplace Health and Wellbeing <a href="https://tinyurl.com/y8nf63tf">https://tinyurl.com/y8nf63tf</a> Professional experience in a relevant field is required. This may include, among others, occupational health, wellbeing, safety, nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, human resources, etc.</p>	<p>1 year 1.5 years 2 years DocWHW 4-6 years</p>	<p>PG Cert PG Dip MSc DocWHW</p>
<p>Cardiff Metropolitan Occupational Safety, Health &amp; Wellbeing <a href="https://tinyurl.com/yd63k2sr">https://tinyurl.com/yd63k2sr</a></p>	<p>1 year FT or up to 3 years PT</p>	<p>PG Cert PG Dip MSc</p>
<p><b>Doctors</b></p>		
<p>Training – <a href="http://www.fom.ac.uk/education/speciality-training/prospective-trainees">http://www.fom.ac.uk/education/speciality-training/prospective-trainees</a> The CESR route – see <a href="http://www.fom.ac.uk/education/cesr">http://www.fom.ac.uk/education/cesr</a> Diplomas – see <a href="http://www.fom.ac.uk/education/examinations/diplomas/doccmcd">http://www.fom.ac.uk/education/examinations/diplomas/doccmcd</a> - courses below</p>		
<p>Manchester University <a href="https://tinyurl.com/yaqyqt9u">https://tinyurl.com/yaqyqt9u</a> This CPD Diploma in Occupational Medicine offers part-time distance learning over six months for those preparing for the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) Diploma in Occupational Medicine (DOccMed) examination. Although the CPD Diploma does not result in an academic qualification from the University, students who have completed the course are eligible for 10 CPD points towards their re-validation. In addition, you have the option to transfer your credits and continue to our</p>	<p>6 months 1 year PT years PT 3 years PT</p>	<p>CPD Diploma PG Cert PG Dip MSc</p>

postgraduate courses for a postgraduate certificate (PGCert), Advanced Diploma (Adv Dip) or Master of Science (MSc) award.		
<p>Royal Society of Public Health</p> <p><a href="https://tinyurl.com/y7fcrklt">https://tinyurl.com/y7fcrklt</a></p> <p>RSPH is approved by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) to run the course to prepare candidates for the Diploma in Occupational Medicine written examination and the oral examination based on a portfolio.</p>	2 weeks	Dip Occ Med
<b>Nurses</b>		
<p>University of Chester</p> <p><b><u><a href="#">Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN)     University of Chester</a></u></b></p>	1 year FT or 2 years PT	BSc Hons MSc (SCPHN)
<p>Derby University</p> <p><a href="https://tinyurl.com/ld6t84u">https://tinyurl.com/ld6t84u</a></p>	1 year FT or 2 years PT	BSc Hons (SCPHN)  MSc
<p>Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen</p> <p><a href="https://tinyurl.com/y9uaky2r">https://tinyurl.com/y9uaky2r</a></p>	1 year FT or 2 years PT  Distance learning	BSc Non NMC
<p>Brunel University, London</p> <p><a href="https://tinyurl.com/ybnoo79y">https://tinyurl.com/ybnoo79y</a></p>	1 year FT or 2 years PT	BSc (SCPHN)  PgDip MSc
<p>University of Cumbria</p> <p><u><a href="#">Graduate Diploma Occupational Health: Practice Development - University of Cumbria</a></u></p>	1-2 years PT or 2-4 years PT	BSc (Hons) (Top out)  University

<p><u>University Advanced Diploma Occupational Health: Practice Development - University of Cumbria</u></p> <p><u>BSc (Hons) Occupational Health: Practice Development (Top-up) - University of Cumbria</u></p>		<p>Advanced Diploma Practice Development</p> <p>Non NMC</p>
<p>University of Chester</p> <p><a href="https://www1.chester.ac.uk/specialist-community-public-health-nursing-scpnh">https://www1.chester.ac.uk/specialist-community-public-health-nursing-scpnh</a></p>	1 year FT	BSc or Graduate Diploma
<p>University of West of England</p> <p><a href="https://tinyurl.com/ya7qwj6v">https://tinyurl.com/ya7qwj6v</a></p>	1 year FT or 2 years PT	BSc (Hons) (SCPHN)
<p>University of West of Scotland</p> <p><a href="https://tinyurl.com/y9855csx">https://tinyurl.com/y9855csx</a></p>	2 years PT or distance learning	Grad Diploma (SCPHN)
<b>OH Physiotherapists</b>		
<p>Varied providers e.g. <a href="https://acpohe.csp.org.uk/content/acpohe-courses">https://acpohe.csp.org.uk/content/acpohe-courses</a></p>	Varied	Short course
<b>OH Psychologists</b>		
<p>Find an accredited course at <a href="https://tinyurl.com/ycnm5tnh">https://tinyurl.com/ycnm5tnh</a>. Examples of advanced courses include Kings College London <a href="https://tinyurl.com/ybuka46z">https://tinyurl.com/ybuka46z</a> and University of Nottingham at <a href="https://tinyurl.com/y8xynexl">https://tinyurl.com/y8xynexl</a></p>		MSc
<b>OH Technicians</b>		
<p>Short courses available e.g. from Network Medical LLP <a href="https://tinyurl.com/ybzd395o">https://tinyurl.com/ybzd395o</a></p> <p>4 Day course form Meduc8ion <a href="https://tinyurl.com/3hbnwcb6">https://tinyurl.com/3hbnwcb6</a></p> <p>The Health &amp; Safety Laboratories (HSL) in Buxton offer a 10 day, part-time course. The</p>		



course is delivered jointly by the University of Sheffield & days of study will be on the University Campus, and 3 days of study will be at the HSL Buxton.		
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**<https://tinyurl.com/yp32h3jj>**

