

For immediate release

July 20, 2021

SOM welcomes first step to support safe and healthy workplaces through occupational health

SOM welcomes the Government's response to the challenge of keeping workplaces safe and healthy. There is a compelling case for occupational health, with less than half the workforce having access to occupational health (OH).

SOM welcomes the focus on quality OH services, to secure improved employee health and productivity – enabling those with long term health conditions, Long COVID and disabilities to remain in work if they wish to do so. We are pleased that the response recognises the lack of access to OH services, to only around half of all employees.

SOM welcomes recognition that occupational health (OH) professionals are uniquely placed to enhance the productivity of the nation by keeping workers healthy and safe.^[1] We hope steps are taken to build capacity and access to OH. SOM welcomes investment in OH, particularly in training up the next generation of OH professionals. SOM agrees with the response's focus on encouraging employers to support employees with health issues and applying the evidence base around what works in getting people back to work.

The President of the SOM, Dr Jayne Moore, said: "SOM welcomes investment in occupational health as it facilitates healthy and safe workplaces. Occupational health doctors, nurses and health professionals are vital to ensuring there is the capacity for scale up of occupational health services that we all want. It will help business confidence as they support workforce health, and as we move to the next stage on the roadmap out of lockdown. We look forward to the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review backing up this response with investment in the occupational health workforce."

SOM is hopeful the Comprehensive Spending Review will support efforts to move towards universal access to occupational health (OH) and better support for return to work for people with Long COVID.

The response has been developed after extensive work with SOM and other stakeholders – covering activity to support the development of health and work research capacity, OH outcomes and quality standards, and incentives to support OH.

Notes for editors:

About The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM): a multidisciplinary professional society whose membership includes 1,800+ OH doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and technicians. SOM Patrons are Lord Blunkett, Dame Carol Black, and Sir Norman Lamb. Its Long COVID Multidisciplinary Group chaired by Professor Ewan Macdonald of the University of Glasgow consists of Long COVID patients, OH specialists, psychiatrists, rheumatology, vocational rehabilitation, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy, from all four devolved NHS organisations. SOM uses patient advocates to produce guidance to support managers on Long COVID such as: https://www.som.org.uk/sites/som.org.uk/files/COVID-19_return_to_work_guide_for_managers.pdf

^[1] Health, work, and wellbeing – evidence and research <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/health-work-and-wellbeing-evidence-and-research>

SOM's inaugural Occupational Health Awareness Week promoted the value of OH to employers and the wider community. Resources are available [here](#). Latest press release on return to work: <https://www.som.org.uk/som-statement-ending-covid-19-restrictions>

Occupational health (OH) helps people of working age access and stay in appropriate work and live full and healthy working lives despite underlying disabilities or health conditions such as Long COVID. Occupational clinicians help employers reduce sickness absence and increase productivity by providing advice on best practice. They advise on fitness for work, return to work programmes, workplace adjustments to enable people with health conditions to return to/remain at work, suitable alternative work, and early retirement on ill health grounds. The need for robust and increasing OH services in many sectors has been highlighted during the COVID-19 crisis. The need for advice from OH on all aspects of business policy and how to protect workers has never been greater, such as putting mental health at the heart of post-pandemic recovery.

Contact

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