



Health at Work Network



#WhyOccupationalHealth

## JOINT STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE NHS LONG TERM PLAN

We welcome this month's publication of the NHS Long Term Plan. It provides explicit recognition that the performance of any healthcare system depends upon its staff, the conditions under which they work and the support given to them in the workplace.

We are pleased to note the plan's commitment to support Trusts to access fast-track Occupational Health (OH) services for their staff and to provide a development programme for line managers. Quality OH services and effective line management can make an important contribution to staff health, workplace productivity and NHS performance.

The NHS Long Term Plan recognizes the important role that all employers have in supporting staff to stay healthy and in work. We welcome the commitment to increase access to OH across all sectors. However, we note that the proposals do depend upon employers' willingness to fund these services.

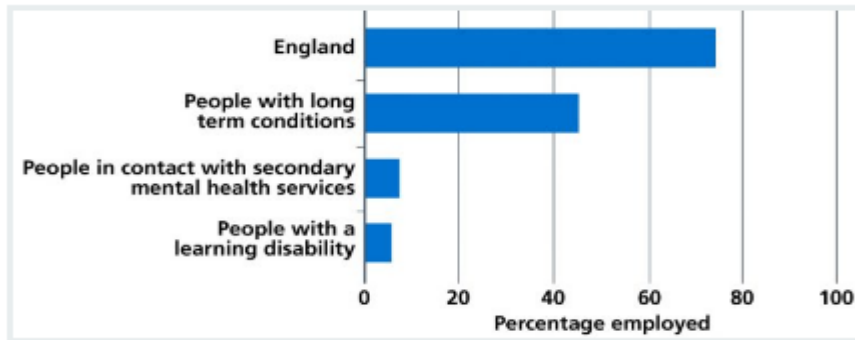
The plan also recognizes the need for improved mental health support for doctors. This could be enhanced by linking such support to OH services, with their expertise in retaining healthcare staff in work.

We believe that all NHS staff, not just doctors, should have access to quality-assured OH support, including clinical leadership from an accredited specialist in Occupational Medicine. NHS Employers recommends that OH services should enable and facilitate the following:

- Prevention of ill health caused or exacerbated by work.
- Timely intervention, including early treatment of the main causes of sickness absence in NHS staff.
- Rehabilitation to help staff stay at work or return to work after illness.
- Fitness for work assessments to support organisations to manage attendance and ill health retirement.
- The promotion of health and wellbeing using work as a means of improving health and wellbeing, and using the workplace to promote health.
- Training to promote staff health and wellbeing to managers.

We are disappointed that the plan does not include recognition of the support which OH could provide to NHS patients, as well as to staff. Our expertise in terms of rehabilitation and return to work could enhance better care for major health conditions, including those highlighted in the plan, musculoskeletal and mental health problems, cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory conditions. The health benefits of being in work are increasingly recognised. However, many people with disabilities and long term health conditions are currently excluded from work, as shown in the graph below. Most such individuals do not have access to OH services and this shortfall was not considered in the NHS Long Term Plan.

**Figure 29: Percentage of the population who are employed, by disability status, England, 2016 to 2017.**



We would welcome the opportunity to work with NHS England to improve access to OH services for both NHS staff and patients. One potential model would involve stepped access to OH teams, with referral to accredited specialists in Occupational Medicine for those with the most complex problems. We hope to continue our effective working relationship with Public Health England, and the Work and Health Unit at DHSC and DWP. We intend to continue to promote being in work as a health outcome. These initiatives will support the Long Term Plan to deliver a sustainable NHS.

### **Additional Background**

[www.nhsemployers.org](http://www.nhsemployers.org) Your Occupational Service 2013, Podcast 2017

[Occupational Health: The Global Evidence and Value](#) - for information on the value proposition for occupational health

[www.seqohs.org](http://www.seqohs.org)

**The Faculty of Occupational Medicine** is the professional and educational body for occupational medicine in the United Kingdom. It seeks to ensure the highest standards in the practice of occupational medicine, overseeing the continuing professional development and revalidation of its members. It is also focused on promoting and supporting health at work, with its mission statement being 'to drive improvement in the health of the working age population.

**The Society of Occupational Medicine** is the UK organisation for all healthcare professionals working in or with an interest in occupational health. It is concerned with the protection of the health of people in the workplace, the prevention of occupational injuries and disease and related environmental issues.

**NHS Health at Work** is the network of occupational health teams dedicated to ensuring that the NHS has a healthy, motivated workforce that can provide the best possible patient care. We also provide a gateway for businesses in the broader community who are seeking occupational health advice and support.

President FOM

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