

Goal zero for work place fatalities in health and social care due to COVID-19 Work related fatalities is not a given

The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) has called on the UK government to now set a goal of Zero Work Caused Fatalities in this pandemic within the NHS, essential services and UK business. It is now joining forces with the British Dental Association, the British Medical Association, the Doctors' Association and many other organisations stating that work-related fatalities due to COVID-19 exposure is not a given.

SOM say with proper application of safe systems of work and PPE, no worker should die of work-acquired COVID-19. It is campaigning alongside many other organisations to raise awareness of the risks facing healthcare and other workers in the UK and globally – to help protect employees and demonstrate good practice. Protecting the workforce is at the core role of occupational health (OH).

It is now calling for organisations and people to back its call on government to set a [Goal for zero work place fatalities in health and social care due to COVID-19](#) based on the following principles:

- PPE to be supplied and used effectively, supported with training, fit testing and management of compliance
- Risk assessments to be carried out and the hierarchy of controls applied
- Minimising exposure, where possible
- Use of ventilation and barriers to reduce exposure and limit time of exposure
- All work caused fatalities to be investigated to allow for correction and dissemination of learning
- Robust and increasing access to occupational health (OH). The need for advice from OH doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, hygienists, and ergonomists amongst other professional groups is required

The new PPE guidance published by the Government is an improvement but should be minimum protection. Where a higher level of protection is available it should be used. We are also pleased that dangerous occurrences and likely work caused fatalities for COVID-19 are now RIDDOR reportable. However, it is necessary that all potential work caused fatalities are investigated and any break down of exposure control identified. This will allow correction and dissemination of learning.

SOM is calling for robust and increasing access to occupational health (OH). The need for advice from OH doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, hygienists, ergonomists etc. is required. The need to protect our workers has never been greater and is the core role of OH. SOM is also supporting a multidisciplinary drive across sectors to raise awareness, share knowledge and engage employees in solutions. It is encouraging workplaces to design-in exposure prevention measures as advised by the Health and Safety Executive – helping employees take the opportunity to better understand the risks and demonstrate good practice in their work.

Dr Will Ponsonby, Society of Occupational Medicine President said:

“The UK could and should have aimed for a target of Zero Work Caused Fatalities in this pandemic. The need to protect our workers has never been greater, and that goal must be put in place as the foundation for all future planning.”

British Dental Association Chair Mick Armstrong said:

“Too many NHS workers are being sent to the frontline inadequately protected. We desperately need a joined-up approach to PPE. Irrespective of official guidelines, all health professionals should be able to access the best available kit.”



Supporting occupational health
and wellbeing professionals

2 St Andrews Place
London NW1 4LB
Telephone: 020 3910 4531

admin@som.org.uk
www.som.org.uk

Notes to editors:

1. PPE guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>
2. *The campaign for a goal of zero work-caused COVID-19 fatalities is supported by the BMA, the BDA, The Doctors' Association, ROSPA, FOHN, BOHS, IOH, IOM, CIEHF, British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy and the Rt Hon Gordon Brown.*
3. If a doctor suspects that a death from COVID-19 may be attributable to the deceased's employment they have a legal obligation to notify HM Coroner (or the Procurator Fiscal in Scotland). Reference <https://www.bmj.com/content/369/bmj.m1288/rr-0>
4. The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) is a multi-disciplinary professional society whose membership includes over 1,700 OH doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and technicians. SOM Patrons are Lord Blunkett, Dame Carol Black and Sir Norman Lamb.
5. SOM is Informing NHS England as to the capacity in the OH private sector to support the NHS. Private providers of OH are currently less busy and could be "redeployed" to assist the NHS and more.
6. SOM's journal *Occupational Medicine* produces articles such as COVID-19 and experiences of moral injury in frontline key workers (see <https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqaa052>). SOM publishes statements e.g. on testing and PPE procurement at www.som.org.uk
7. Occupational health helps people of working age access and stay in appropriate work and live full and healthy working lives despite underlying disabilities or health conditions. They help employers reduce sickness absence and increase productivity by providing advice on best practice and how to comply with legal duties such as the Equality Act 2010 and Health and Safety legislation. 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 value of OH is set out in *Occupational Health: the value proposition* https://www.som.org.uk/sites/som.org.uk/files/Occupational_health_the_value_proposition_0.pdf; *Occupational Health: The Global Evidence and Value* https://www.som.org.uk/sites/som.org.uk/files/OH-the_global_evidence_and_value_Apr_2018.pdf; and *The Value of Occupational Health to Workplace Wellbeing* <https://www.som.org.uk/value-occupational-health-workplace-wellbeing-register-your-free-copy>. In June 2019, the SOM published an evidence-based report on 'The Value of Occupational Health Research' https://www.som.org.uk/sites/som.org.uk/files/SOM_Value_OH_Research_June2019.pdf, funded by the Health and Safety Executive. It identified the important impact of workplace ill health on UK productivity, the high associated economic costs and the unmet need for effective research to guide future policy.
8. Occupational clinicians interpret the instructions of the government and Public Health England/Health Protection Scotland and the most up-to-date clinical evidence to support businesses in keeping their workforce well. They use their combination of clinical expertise and deep understanding of how health affects work to empower managers and employers to make the right decisions, at the right time, to ensure the health both of their employees and their businesses e.g. what employers should do when workers are pregnant and what steps managers should take with their older and more vulnerable employees.
9. The need for robust and increasing occupational health (OH) services in many sectors has been highlighted during this COVID-19 crisis. The need for advice from occupational health doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, hygienists, ergonomists etc. on all aspect of business policy, the adequacy of control and how to protect our workers continuing to face the public has never been greater, and is the core role of OH. Detailed functions of the OH team are:
 - ensuring those within the workplace are safe through
 - risk assessments and advising on appropriate controls
 - face fit testing
 - advice on home working
 - advocacy - lobbying for appropriate controls (PPE specifically)
 - ensuring workers are well enough to be in work, in roles that need to continue
 - providing advice on vulnerable workers falling outside of the government advice
 - ensuring safety critical workers are fit to work/drive
 - advice on redeployment to suitable roles based on vulnerability
 - transport medicals
 - safety critical medicals
 - and ensuring that those within the workforce remain well, advising on and providing mental health support and assessing those for whom health is worsening by being isolated/at home.

Contact: nick.pahl@som.org.uk Tel: 0203 910 4537 Mobile 07969 279 149

Nick Pahl | CEO, SOM

2 St Andrews Place | London | NW1 4LB | www.som.org.uk

Patrons: Lord Blunkett, Dame Carol Black, Sir Norman Lamb MP

VAT no 927 0030 57

A charity established in 1935