**UNDERSTANDING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH**

**What is Occupational Health?**

Occupational Health (OH) focuses on protecting and promoting the health, safety, and wellbeing of the working population. OH professionals prevent work-related illnesses and injuries, support rehabilitation, and enhance workforce productivity by aligning clinical care with business and regulatory priorities,

**Why Occupational Health Matters on a Global Scale**

* Economic Burden: The ILO estimates that work-related injuries and diseases cost the global economy over $3 trillion annually (International Labour Organisation, 2023).
* Strategic Relevance: OH is integral to ensuring compliance with international workplace laws, and future-proofing organisations against health-related risks (SOM, 2024).
* Post-Pandemic Landscape: Long COVID, mental health, hybrid work fatigue, and return-to-work strategies have elevated occupational health (OH) into board-level conversations (SOM, 2024).

**What Occupational Health Professionals Do:**

1. Assess and mitigate workplace risks.
2. Advise on Policy and compliance.
3. Provide health surveillance and case management.
4. Support staff with mental health, musculoskeletal and chronic illness needs (Faculty of Occupational Medicine, 2024).

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**CAREER PATHWAYS AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES**

Occupational Physicians: Medical doctors specialising in workplace health and strategy.

OH Nurses: Provide health surveillance, and health management.

Allied Health Professionals: Physiotherapists, Psychologists, Ergonomists etc

Technicians and Assessors: Conduct audiometry, spirometry, tests

[**Entry Routes**](https://www.som.org.uk/sites/som.org.uk/files/Choosing_occupational_health_as_a_career_2024%20September.pdf)

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Role** | **Route** | **Qualifications** |
| Occupational Physician | Medical degree →Work experience →Formal OH training | DOccMed, MFOM, AFOM (via Faculty of Occupational Medicine) |
| OH Nurse | Registered Nurse (RN) →OH experience -> Specialist training | SCPHN(OH), MSc in Workplace Health, Diploma in OH Nursing |
| Allied Health Professionals | Degree in physio, psychology, or related field → OH- focused postgraduate study | PGCert, MSc in Occupational Health, relevant CPD pathways |
| Technicians/ Assessors | Technical or clinical background →On-the-job training or accredited short courses | SOM – endorsed qualifications (e.g., audiometry, spirometry) |

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**Support & Development**

* Mentoring connecting new entrants with experienced professionals.
* Funded qualifications (e.g., Florence Nightingale Foundation, SOM scholarship)
* Diverse Employment: NHS, private practice, corporate consultancy, public policy

**STRATEGIC TRENDS IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH**

**Digital Health & Technological Transformation**

Innovation in Practice: OH is embracing digital tools – AI triage, wearable biometrics, electronic health surveillance – to deliver faster and more personalised care.

Workplace Integration: Digital platforms now link health data to HR, risk, and ESG systems, enabling real-time decision-making and early intervention.

**Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) in Health Strategy**

Inclusive Risk Assessment: OH is key to designing work environments that are psychologically and physically safe for neurodiverse, multi-generational and disabled staff.

Health Equity Lens: OH supports tailored wellbeing interventions that reflect ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic risk factors (NICE, 2023; SOM, 2024).

**Crisis Management & Organisational Resilience**

Frontline of Health Crises: From COVID-19 to mental health, OH Leads multi-level response

Recovery & Continuity: Occupational health professionals develop agile frameworks for return-to-work, absence management, and organisational resilience tailored to the needs of workforces (WHO, 2021; ILO, 2023).

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**Global Standards & Cross-Border Policy Influence**

ISO & ESG integration: OH informs international standards (e.g., ISO 45001), health KPISs in ESG reports, and compliance across jurisdictions.

Strategic Advisory Role: OH professionals increasingly consult at board level, influencing policies on workforce wellbeing, retention, and risk (ILO, 2023; SOM, 2024).

**WHY CHOOSE OH – A CAREER OF IMPACT AND OPPORTUNITY**

**Personal and Professional Benefits**

* Make a tangible difference to individuals and workforces.
* Enjoy a competitive salary, stable hours, and a better work-life balance.
* Work in multidisciplinary teams, influencing organisational policy and shaping national or international health strategy.
* Access opportunities for research, teaching, public health advocacy and strategic consultancy).
* Benefit from international mobility, as OH skills are increasingly in demand globally.

**Considerations**

* OH is advisory - roles are non-treatment based.
* An understanding of healthcare and business or organisational strategy.
* A commitment to continuous learning and multi-sector awareness is vital.

**OH is a Career with Influence**

Whether you are a clinician, strategist, educator, or innovator, OH offers a unique platform to improve health and drive sustainable corporate change. Its influence reaches across industries, borders, and professional domains -shaping healthier, more resilient workforces for the future (SOM, 2024).

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