

The Occupational Health Professional's Services and Qualifications: Questions and Answers

What Issues Should be Considered in Selecting a Health Care Professional?

What *Unique* Contributions Can an Occupational Health Care Professional Make to Workplace Safety and Health?

Who are Qualified Occupational Health Care Professionals?

How Can an Employer Verify the Scope of Practice for Health Care Professionals in the Licensing State?

What Qualifications Should an Employer Look for in an Occupational Health Care Professional?

Is There a Good Way to Evaluate the Qualifications of an Occupational Health Care Professional?

Sources of Assistance:

American Academy of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN)

American Board of Industrial Hygiene (ABIH)

American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM)

Board of Certified Safety Professionals (BCSP)

The Occupational Health Professional's Services and Qualifications: Questions and Answers

Controlling occupational injuries and illnesses and related expenditures is a top priority in most companies. Selecting a qualified health care professional to participate in the workplace safety and health activities can be a vital step in this process. The following questions and answers are to provide guidance and serve as a resource for those considering such a selection.

WHAT ISSUES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN SELECTING A HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL?

A variety of health care professionals are available to employers. Selecting an appropriate provider for the worksite depends on a number of factors, including:

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA's) medical surveillance requirements for specific substances or hazards associated with the worksite;
- The number, diversity, size, and seriousness of the hazards involved at the worksite(s);
- Distance to the closest trauma center or health care facility.

At a minimum, workplace safety and health involves management support, employee involvement, worksite analysis, hazard prevention and control, health care management (including medical surveillance for disease and injury), and training and education.

Qualified occupational health care professionals can assist the employer in achieving a safe and healthy work environment. Along with other safety and health professionals, health care professionals work collaboratively with labor and management to:

- Identify potential hazards and to find ways to prevent, eliminate, minimize, or reduce hazards.
- Develop and manage training programs to promote workplace health and safety.
- Maintain OSHA recordkeeping forms and legally required records such as workers' compensation files.

WHAT *UNIQUE* CONTRIBUTIONS CAN AN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL MAKE TO WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH?

Health care professionals are uniquely qualified to assess and treat illnesses and injuries. The health care professional must have appropriate licensure, registration, or certification. Additionally, they should have occupational health experience and expertise in management and be available on a full- or part-time basis, depending on the nature and size of worksite(s). They may be a permanent employee or hired on a contractual basis. Traditionally, these services have been provided by physicians or registered nurses.

In addition to working collaboratively with other safety and health professionals, a qualified health care professional may be selected to:

- Provide medical screening related to specific chemicals or exposures, including preplacement (post-offer) physical examinations, job placement assessments, periodic examinations, and maintenance of individual employee medical records as required by OSHA.
- Manage and/or treat work-related illnesses and injuries, with emphasis on early recognition and intervention; and follow-up and monitor workers as they return to work.
- Develop and implement health promotion programs.
- Provide guidance for case management of employees who have prolonged or complex illnesses and injuries.

For small employers, or those with limited resources, one of several models for delivering occupational health care at the workplace can be considered. This might involve sharing the services of health care professionals within a business or industrial park, or contracting with a larger firm whose occupational health service include an occupational health care professional as part of its total safety and health program.

Health care providers such as physician assistants (PAs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs), and emergency medical technicians/paramedics (EMTs) can augment the services of the physician or registered nurse. Although these providers may contribute valuable services, they must be supervised by a physician or a registered nurse.

Whatever health care professional is chosen, the employer should ensure that the provider has expertise or experience in occupational health and safety as well as an understanding of occupational illnesses and injuries.

WHO ARE QUALIFIED OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS?

Health care professionals qualified to design, manage, supervise, and deliver health care in occupational settings include a variety of practitioners. It is imperative, however, that the legal "scope of practice" unique to each state be considered prior to hiring or contracting for services. The "scope of practice" refers to the credentials, responsibilities, and limitations of health care practitioners.

Physicians and registered nurses, for example, receive standardized educations with core curricula (individualized to their profession) necessary to pass national or state boards and to be licensed in a particular state. They are then eligible to become certified in a specialty practice, such as occupational medicine (physicians) or occupational health nursing (registered nurses), through a combination of additional specific education and experience. The additional educational training in occupational health typically includes course work in epidemiology, toxicology, industrial

hygiene, recognition and management of occupational illnesses and injuries, research, and general management of a comprehensive occupational health program.

Physicians

Medical Doctors: Medical doctors (MDs) have completed 4 years of study at the college level and then 4 years of training at an accredited school. Licensed MDs have passed the National Medical Board Exam or equivalent examinations and have a license to practice within a given state(s).

Doctors of Osteopathy: Doctors of osteopathy (DOs) graduate from college and an osteopathic school approved by the American Osteopathic Association. They must pass a state board examination to qualify for a license to practice within a given state(s).

Occupational Medicine Physicians: Occupational medicine physicians are medical doctors or doctors of osteopathy who have completed additional occupational medicine training or acquired onsite experience. Completion of additional residency training and further practice in occupational medicine enables physicians to pursue certification in occupational medicine after meeting rigorous qualifying standards and successfully completing an examination in occupational medicine given by the American Board of Preventive Medicine (ABPM).

Registered Nurses

Registered Nurses: Registered nurses (RNs) receive from 2 to 4 years of training and education at the college level and graduate from a state-approved school of nursing. They pass a state board examination and are granted a license to practice within a given state(s).

Occupational Health Nurses: Occupational health nurses (OHNs) are registered nurses with experience and additional education in occupational health. Certified occupational health nurses (COHNs) obtain certification from the American Board for Occupational Health Nurses after meeting rigorous qualifying educational and experience standards and successfully passing an occupational health nursing examination.

Nurse Practitioners: Nurse practitioners (NPs) are registered nurses who are licensed in their state and have completed formal advanced education, increasingly at the master's level. In most states, they are certified for advanced practice by the American Nurses Association or specialty nursing organizations. NPs independently perform many health evaluation and care activities, including physical exams, common diagnostic and laboratory tests, and treatment of employees who are ill or injured. They also can prescribe certain medications in most states. Additionally, NPs perform other medical activities using written protocols developed collaboratively with a physician.

Physician Assistants

Physician Assistants: Physician assistants (PAs) provide services under the direction and supervision of a doctor of medicine or osteopathy. PAs may perform physical examinations, identify

health problems, and plan therapeutic interventions. PAs are usually required to complete a 2-year educational program at the bachelor's or master's degree level.

Other Health Care Providers

Other health care providers include licensed practical or vocational nurses and emergency medical technicians. Traditionally, these individuals are not licensed to practice independently. They have specific training and are usually certified or licensed by the educational institution where they received the training. Sometimes the state licenses or certifies these providers and usually the state's scope of practice outlines the specific work restrictions for these individuals. For example, usually these providers are required to work under the supervision of licensed health care professionals such as MDs, DOs, RNs, and NPs, except when delivering first aid.

Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurses: Licensed practical or vocational nurses (LPN/LVNs) graduate from a program of practical nursing and must pass the state board examination. They are licensed by the state to perform certain specific health care activities, under the direct supervision of a physician or registered nurse.

Emergency Medical Technicians/Paramedics: Emergency medical technicians (EMTs) are pre-hospital providers trained to provide specific and limited emergency care. Some EMTs receive advanced training to become paramedics. EMTs are authorized to perform their duties by standing orders or protocols from physicians. They respond primarily to injuries and acute illnesses on a temporary basis and are not independently licensed to provide other medical care. Their scope of practice varies greatly from state to state.

HOW CAN AN EMPLOYER VERIFY THE SCOPE OF PRACTICE FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS IN THE LICENSING STATE?

Each state has a unique legal description of the scope of practice for health care professionals. When it is necessary to verify a health care professional's scope of practice for the occupational setting, the individual state's licensing or certification board should be contacted, as follows:

Medical Doctor

State boards of medical examiners and professional licensure can provide information about an occupational physician's educational training and type of practice. The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) publishes an annual list of certified occupational medicine specialists. The employer may refer to the ABMS listings in the reference department of most public libraries.

Doctor of Osteopathy

Doctors of osteopathy are licensed by a board in each state. Listings may include Board of Medical Examiners, Licensing Examiners, Board of Osteopathic Examiners, Board of Medical Practice, or Medical Licensing Board of (name of particular state). The American Board of Medical Specialties

(ABMS) publishes an annual list of certified occupational medicine specialists (See M.D. listing above).

Registered Nurse and Nurse Practitioner

The state board of nursing in each state is listed in the telephone directory and defines the scope of practice issues for RNs and NPs. The American Nurses Association (ANA) certifies NPs. The American Board for Occupational Health Nurses (ABOHN) certifies RNs in the specialty of occupational health.

Physician Assistant

The legal scope of practice for PAs varies from state to state. Most states require licensure or certification. PAs are certified by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA). All scope of practice issues for PAs should be addressed to the State Board of Medicine or The NCCPA.

Emergency Medical Technician

The EMT's scope of practice varies from state to state. There are several practice levels of EMTs each determined by the number of hours of training and the range of procedures authorized. Each state has a director of EMTs listed in the telephone directory under State Government. The appropriate office may be contacted under the telephone directory subheading listed as either the Department of Health, Department of Public Health, or Department of Emergency Medical Services.

Licensed Vocational/Practical Nurse

The state board of nursing in each state is listed in the telephone directory and defines the scope of practice issues for LVNs/LPNs.

WHAT QUALIFICATIONS SHOULD AN EMPLOYER LOOK FOR IN AN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL?

An occupational health care professional evaluates the interactions between employees' work and health in the workplace. To do this effectively, the occupational health care professional should possess the following skills and competencies:

- General knowledge of the work environment, including worksite operations; familiarity with the toxic properties of materials used by employees as well as the potential hazards and stressors of work processes and jobs or tasks.
- Ability to determine an employee's physical and emotional fitness for work.
- Ability to recognize, evaluate, treat, and/or refer occupational illnesses and injuries.

- Knowledge of workers' compensation laws; local, state and federal regulatory requirements; and systems for maintaining health records.
- Ability to organize and manage the delivery of health care services.
- Knowledge of legal and ethical issues related to occupational health care practice.

In addition to administering the health care program and supervising health care personnel, the occupational health care professional should communicate with workers and managers at all levels. *Most importantly, the health care professional **must** maintain confidentiality between the health care professional and the employee as required by OSHA, professional ethics codes, and individual state privacy acts. Management should only be provided the necessary information to make an informed and competent decision on occupational health and safety issues.*

IS THERE A GOOD WAY TO EVALUATE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL?

During the interview process, the following kinds of questions and issues are appropriate to evaluate prospective occupational health care professionals:

- What type of education/training does the candidate have?
 - Note graduation date and all degrees and type of specialty certification;
 - Titles of continuing education courses taken in the last 2 years;
 - Where and when licensed, registered, or certified (ask for documentation); and
 - Years of experience in occupational health.
- In what type of industries has the candidate had experience?
- What kind of management experience(s) has the candidate had? For how long?
- What does the candidate know about OSHA recordkeeping requirements?
- Has the candidate ever prepared for and/or participated in an OSHA inspection?
- Does the candidate know about workers' compensation laws in your state?
- Is the candidate familiar with the Americans with Disabilities Act?
- What kind of information does the candidate want to know about your business?
- How can the candidate develop or improve your safety and health program?
You should expect the candidate to ask about the following:
 - facilities (type, location)
 - number of employees

- work processes
 - known or potential hazards
 - application of standards and/or regulations
 - current method of providing occupational health care services
 - other health care providers involved in providing services
 - existence and specifics of a safety and health program
 - medical surveillance programs
 - collective bargaining contracts
 - previous OSHA citations
- References from current/previous employers or educational institutions should be requested.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS AND OTHER OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS SUCH AS INDUSTRIAL HYGIENISTS, INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERS, OR CERTIFIED SAFETY PROFESSIONALS?

All occupational health and safety professionals are educated to have a proactive, preventive orientation, with the health and well being of the employee as their primary focus. As mandated by each individual state, however, only health care professionals, within the scope of their practice, can assess and treat illness and injury beyond first aid. Additionally, health care professionals, based upon their education and training, can provide high-quality preventive health care information and programs.

The following descriptions highlight the overall skills and areas of competency of other occupational safety and health professionals who might be part of an effective safety and health program at your work site.

Industrial Hygiene

Industrial hygiene focuses on the identification and control of occupational health hazards arising as a result of or during work. The industrial hygienist focuses on the recognition, evaluation, and control of chemical, biological, or physical factors or stressors arising from the workplace, that may cause sickness, impaired health and well-being, or significant discomfort and inefficiency among workers or in the community. Professional industrial hygienists possess either a baccalaureate or master's degree in engineering, chemistry, biology, physics, or industrial hygiene.

The industrial hygienist monitors and uses analytical methods to detect the extent of occupational chemical, biological, or physical exposure and implements engineering controls and work practices to correct, reduce, or eliminate workplace hazards. Industrial hygienists can give expert opinion as to the magnitude of chemical, biological, or physical exposure, and the degree of associated risk. Certified Industrial Hygienists (CIHs) have passed a rigorous qualifying examination.

Industrial Engineering

Industrial engineering is the design, installation, and improvement of integrated systems of people, material, information, equipment, and energy. Industrial engineering draws upon specialized knowledge and skills in the mathematical, physical, and social sciences, together with principles and methods of engineering analysis and design to specify, predict, and evaluate the results obtained from such systems.

The Institute of Industrial Engineers has a special division devoted to ergonomics, and many industrial engineers elect to receive advanced training in this increasingly complex and growing specialty.

Certified Safety Professional

Generally, Certified Safety Professionals (CSPs) graduate from accredited college or university programs with a baccalaureate or master's degree in safety and must have at least 4 years of professional safety experience prior to taking the Safety Fundamentals exam. CSPs focus on developing procedures, standards, or systems to achieve the control or reduction of hazards and exposures that would be detrimental to people, property, and/or the environment.

Occupational Health Professional's Services

- Identify potential hazards and find ways to prevent, eliminate, minimize, or reduce hazards.
- Develop and manage training programs to promote workplace health and safety.
- Maintain OSHA recordkeeping forms and workers' compensation files.
- Provide medical screening related to specific chemicals or exposures, including preplacement (post-offer) physical examinations, job placement assessments, periodic examinations, and maintenance of individual employee medical records as required by OSHA.
- Manage and/or treat work-related illnesses and injuries, with emphasis on early recognition and intervention; and follow-up and monitor workers as they return to work.
- Develop and implement health promotion programs.
- Provide guidance for case management of employees who have prolonged or complex illnesses and injuries.

Delivery of Occupational Health Care

Small employers, or those with limited resources, might share the services of health care professionals within a business or industrial park, or contract with a larger firm whose occupational health service includes an occupational health care professional as part of its total safety and health program.

Qualified Occupational Health Care Professionals

Physicians

Medical Doctors (MDs):

- Have completed 4 years of study at the college level and then 4 years of training at an accredited school.
- Licensed MDs have passed the National Medical Board Exam or equivalent examinations and have a license to practice within a given state(s).

Doctors of Osteopathy (DOs):

- Graduate from college and an osteopathic school approved by the American Osteopathic Association.
- Must pass a state board examination to qualify for a license to practice within a given state(s).

Occupational Medicine Physicians:

- MDs or DOs who have completed additional occupational medicine training or acquired onsite experience.
- Completion of additional residency training and further practice in occupational medicine enables physicians to pursue certification in occupational medicine after meeting rigorous qualifying standards and passing exam given by the American Board of Preventive Medicine (ABPM).

Qualified Occupational Health Care Professionals (cont'd)

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- Usually required to complete a 2-year educational program at the bachelor's or master's degree level.

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How to Verify the Scope of Practice for Health Care Professionals in the Licensing State (cont'd)

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- **General knowledge of the work environment, including worksite operations; familiarity with the toxic properties of materials used by employees as well as the potential hazards and stressors of work processes and jobs or tasks.**
- **Ability to determine an employee's physical and emotional fitness for work.**
- **Ability to recognize, evaluate, treat, and/or refer occupational illnesses and injuries.**
- **Knowledge of workers' compensation laws; local, state and federal regulatory requirements; and systems for maintaining health records.**
- **Ability to organize and manage the delivery of health care services.**
- **Knowledge of legal and ethical issues related to occupational health care practice.**

How to Evaluate the Qualifications of an Occupational Health Care Professional

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 - ▶ Titles of continuing education courses taken in the last 2 years;
 - ▶ Where and when licensed, registered, or certified (ask for documentation); and
 - ▶ Years of experience in occupational health.

- In what type of industries has the candidate had experience?

- What kind of management experience(s) has the candidate had? For how long?

- What does the candidate know about OSHA recordkeeping requirements?

- Has the candidate ever prepared for and/or participated in an OSHA inspection?

- Does the candidate know about workers' compensation laws in your state?

How to Evaluate the Qualifications of an Occupational Health Care Professional (cont'd)

- Is the candidate familiar with the Americans with Disabilities Act?
- What kind of information does the candidate want to know about your business?
- How can the candidate develop or improve your safety and health program?
- You should expect the candidate to ask about the following:
 - ▶ facilities (type, location)
 - ▶ number of employees
 - ▶ work processes
 - ▶ known or potential hazards
 - ▶ application of standards and/or regulations
 - ▶ current method of providing occupational health care services
 - ▶ other health care providers involved in providing services
 - ▶ existence and specifics of a safety and health program
 - ▶ medical surveillance programs
 - ▶ collective bargaining contracts
 - ▶ previous OSHA citations
- References from current/previous employers or educational institutions should be requested.

Other Occupational Safety and Health Professionals

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- The industrial hygienist (IH) focuses on the recognition, evaluation, and control of chemical, biological, or physical factors or stressors arising from the workplace, that may cause sickness, impaired health and well-being, or significant discomfort and inefficiency among workers or in the community.
- Professional industrial hygienists possess either a baccalaureate or master's degree in engineering, chemistry, biology, physics, or industrial hygiene. Certified Industrial Hygienists (CIHs) have passed a rigorous qualifying examination.
- The IH monitors and uses analytical methods to detect the extent of occupational chemical, biological, or physical exposure and implements engineering controls and work practices to correct, reduce, or eliminate workplace hazards.
- IH's can give expert opinion as to the magnitude of chemical, biological, or physical exposure, and the degree of associated risk.

Other Occupational Safety and Health Professionals (cont'd)

Industrial Engineering

- Industrial engineering is the design, installation, and improvement of integrated systems of people, material, information, equipment, and energy.
- Industrial engineering draws upon specialized knowledge and skills in the mathematical, physical, and social sciences, together with principles and methods of engineering analysis and design to specify, predict, and evaluate the results obtained from such systems.
- The Institute of Industrial Engineers has a special division devoted to ergonomics, and many industrial engineers elect to receive advanced training in this increasingly complex and growing specialty.

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