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# Advice for Managers When Making a Referral for Occupational Health Opinion

The following information may help you in making a referral.

Referrals can be posted to Occupational Health Department Bensham Hospital Saltwell Road Gateshead NE8 4YL or emailed to [ghnt.occupational.health@nhs.net](mailto:ghnt.occupational.health@nhs.net)

All referrals will be triaged by a Specialist Nurse Practitioner in Occupational Health who may contact you for further information. Please ensure the referral is completed fully otherwise it may need to be returned to you for completion, which may result in a delay in the employee’s appointment being made. It is essential that any referrals are discussed with the employee and that they understand the reason why they are being referred; are aware of what information you have included in the referral and what questions you are asking (a copy of referral should be provided to them). Employees will be asked at the beginning of their appointment if the referral has been discussed with them – if they were unaware of it or dispute the content of the referral, it may not be possible to proceed with the consultation. We will then not arrange any further appointments until you have confirmed with us that this has been discussed; that the employee understands. It is a contractual obligation for employees to attend Occupational Health if requested to do so by their manager and that they agree to attend and proceed with an appointment and any assessment that may be needed. If the employee refuses to attend, advice should be obtained from HR. Please note that any referrals which are not completed correctly or in full will be sent back for you to complete.

A Specialist Nurse Practitioner will be allocated as a case manager for employees who have been referred and they may assess the employee and advise you accordingly; or refer the employee to the Occupational Health Physician. Referrals may also be made to others e.g. clinical ergonomic team, counsellors, physio etc. if it is felt necessary. For training purposes, some referrals may be seen (under the guidance and supervision of Specialist Nurse Practitioners or the Occupational Health Physician) by an occupational health nurse advisor who is undergoing training to achieve a qualification in occupational health nursing.

Referrals should be made as outlined in the Trust policy on absence management (PP11) and this policy should be consulted when managing sickness absence.

If following absence, you do not feel that a referral is necessary, you must ensure that that the employee has no limitations or restrictions in their activities and that they feel fully fit to return to work. It is also advisable that you check with the employee that their GP is in agreement that they are fit to return to work (as opposed to the employee asking their GP to agree a return because the employee feels they should be back to work – often because they have a financial need to return to work or feels ‘guilty’ about being off). If you have any concerns regarding this, advice can be obtained from the occupational health nursing team.

## General Guidance

When making a referral, you should stick to the facts and avoid making a ‘diagnosis’ of what may be wrong with the person unless you have received this information from someone who is qualified to provide this (e.g. from fit note). The referral should be related to the employee only and if it is relevant to include information about a third party, it is advisable to use generic terms e.g. colleague, manager etc rather than include names of specific individuals.

Please be aware that this form becomes part of the employee’s occupational health records and as such they have a right to see it under the Access to Medical Records Act - avoid putting anything in writing that you wouldn’t be happy for them to read! Itis normal practice that the contents of the referral are shared with the employee at their appointment.

Finally if you do want us to consider any information when making an assessment you must be prepared to put this in writing.

## When should I refer an employee?

Please ensure that all referrals are done in a timely manner especially if you require an appointment for an employee to be seen before they return to work – it will not normally be possible to provide an appointment for an employee to return to work on Monday if we only receive the referral a few days before this.

**Short term sickness absence:** refer an employee after you have met with them and discussed the absence. If at an early stage you or the employee identify that there is / may be a medical or health reason for the absence a referral can be made. If no health problems are identified you should make a referral after any agreed targets to improve attendance have not been met and before you begin to consider taking any disciplinary action.

**Long term sickness absence:** Employees should be referred after they have been absent from work (or are expected to be absent from work) due to sickness for 4 weeks or more and it is advisable that you have made a referral before they enter half pay at the latest.

**Management referral for employees who are still at work:** Sometimes employees are not experiencing any sickness absence but may be experiencing some problems with their health that is affecting their ability to do their job or their job may be affecting their health. These employees should also be referred for assessment.

## Personal details

Please ensure you are providing us with the employees full first and surname, their date of birth and a current address, contact number. This is important as this is the address that the appointment will be sent to and sometimes employees fail to attend their appointment because we have been given an incorrect address.

## Job Details

Information is needed about the employee’s job title, grade and the department they work in.

## Sickness Details

It is important that we have accurate information on their sickness absence record over the last 12 months (or longer if you feel this is relevant). Please tell us if there is a particular pattern to this – e.g. before / after days off, holidays or phoning in sick when on days off holidays etc. This may be especially important for short-term sickness absence referrals. If the employee is currently off sick – provide details on the date this started, the reason for their sickness and a planned date of return (if known as this will help us to ensure their appointment is as far as possible before their return).

## Additional comments / information

This section is extremely important and the more information you can provide us with the more effective the referral will be.

A common comment that gets included in this section is the person’s job title or that the employee’s absence is causing difficulties providing cover for the department. We recognise that cover is going to be more difficult to arrange when someone is off sick but this does not provide us with any information about the employee’s particular circumstances. Useful things to include here include:

* A brief overview of their job activities, normal working pattern details of any expected rotation to a different department / section or to work night shift etc.
* Are there any specific hazards that the employee is exposed to that may be relevant to the referral – for example is it a mentally or physically demanding job; is the job repetitive in nature, are they standing or sitting a lot, do they have to manage other staff or juggle many differing demands?
* Are there any interpersonal difficulties with colleagues or managers, have there been any poor performance issues / disciplinary processes or does the employee have any problems at home or work that may account for or contribute to the problem? Are they having difficulty concentrating or focusing on tasks, are they making mistakes or being, slow in performing aspects of their job. If any of these have occurred please provide us with some brief details and if there are none that you are aware of, please tell us this. We do not need to know the full details but some examples of the problems you have identified or common themes are useful for us to know.
* What you have done to manage the sickness absence so far – particularly with short term absence referrals
* Have you made any adjustments to the employee’s workload, role or duties to help them with the problem? If so tell us what and how successful has this been. If not is there anything you can suggest that may help – you know the workplace better than we do and we will be happy to advise you on whether what you are proposing would be appropriate or not.
* For long-term sickness absence –has the employee given any indication of when they are hoping to be back at work?

## Information required

Please select the section(s) on the referral form that you would like us to advise on. If there is any other information you would like us to include in our report, please put this is question format and we will respond to this. However for reasons of confidentiality, we are unable to divulge medical information without the employees consent. The more specific you can be in identifying what information you would like or need to help you manage the employee’s sickness, the more specific the report will be.

### Reports from Occupational Health

We aim to have reports sent to managers within 2 working days after the appointment and these will be e mailed to your NHS address. If when you get the report, you don’t understand it or it doesn’t answer your questions please contact the department to discuss this

### Any Questions?

If you are unsure on how to make a referral or whether a referral is appropriate, please contact one of the Specialist Nurse Practitioners on Ext. 5494 (0191 445 5494) or speak with your link HR manager for advice.