

**For immediate release
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New report reveals the value of occupational health to UK businesses and workers

A new report published today by the Society of Occupational Medicine sets out the value proposition for occupational health services and the benefits of occupational health.

Occupational health: the value proposition cites evidence that shows organisations most commonly rank occupational health involvement as the most effective method for managing the problem of employee long-term absence from work. The document also reports that a healthy workplace culture and the adoption of a systematic approach to occupational health can contribute to the success of an organisation.

SOM Patron, Lord Blunkett, said of the findings: *“This report provides a comprehensive analysis and evidence review of the value of occupational health. It comes at a critical time for the policy agenda for work and health, and the challenge of the productivity gap. It is essential reading for managers, clinicians and policy makers.”*

Despite concerns over costs of occupational health interventions, the evidence shows that occupational health services should in fact be highly cost-effective, provided that there are a variety of skills on offer, that occupational health professionals work to their distinctive competencies, and that the work performed adds value.

Professor Dame Carol Black welcomed the report, as follows: *“The health of people of working age has consequences far beyond themselves – touching their families, workplaces and wider communities. The economic costs of ill-health and its impact on work are measurable; but the human costs are often hidden. Working for a healthier tomorrow recommended an expanded role for occupational health that should be available to all. I welcome the new SOM report which distils the evidence to support investment in occupational health services and the benefits provided to people of working age, employers and society.”*

Occupational health services have a clear value: they improve the health of the working population; contribute to the prevention of work-related illnesses; prevent avoidable sickness absence through the provision of early interventions for those who develop a health condition; and increase the efficiency and productivity of organisations. They can also play a major part in protecting and revitalising the UK’s economy.

The report has also been welcomed by The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents; the BMA OM committee; Chair of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, Dr Paul Litchfield; and Rachel Suff, Policy Lead for Health and Wellbeing, CIPD.

The report is available at: www.som.org.uk along with three leaflets, for managers, workers and commissioners. It is also available on the *Why Occupational Health?* website: www.whyoccupationalhealth.co.uk

Notes to editors

Work-related illness and injury place a heavy burden on the UK economy:

- An estimated 25.9 million working days were lost due to work-related illness in 2015-16, while an estimated 4.5 million days were lost due to workplace injury.

- In 2014-15, it was estimated that injuries and new cases of illness cost the UK economy £14.1 billion; and in 2015-16 long-term sickness absence cost the state £14.5 billion in Employment and Support Allowance.

The report sets out the four imperatives for occupational health: legal, moral, business, and financial. Legally speaking, litigation can risk company reputation and business can suffer as a result; from a moral perspective, the protection and promotion of employee health is an integral aspect of corporate social responsibility; in business, employee health and wellbeing is a contributor to successful performance; while financially, poor employee health is associated with costs to employers that can be highly significant.

The report cites a survey of 1,000 UK employers in which respondents gave their most common reasons to spend on health and wellbeing initiatives as: a motivated and healthy workforce is more productive (41%); to attract and retain staff (25%); to be perceived as a caring employer that takes duty of care requirements seriously (21%). Meanwhile, a survey of 1,000 employees found that they were more likely to choose an employer who took employee health and wellbeing seriously (66%) and would feel they have a duty to work harder for such an employer (43%). The survey results are reflective of the intangible as well as tangible benefits of occupational health.

In terms of tangible benefits, a number of occupational health interventions are shown to be cost-effective and to have short payback periods. Ergonomic interventions are reported as the most profitable, and have the added benefit of short payback periods (up to two years). A survey of companies in 16 countries suggested that the strongest impact from occupational health and safety interventions was felt in production, transport and warehousing.

It is important to note that designing and delivering both effective and cost-effective occupational health services requires expert and skilled consideration.

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