

International Hazard Datasheets on Occupation



Occupational physician

Who is an occupational physician?

An occupational physician is a general medical practitioner who has completed a specialization/residency period in occupational medicine and health, and is certified to work in this field. Occupational physicians are engaged in prevention (pre-employment medical examinations), diagnosis (biological monitoring and periodical examinations) as well as in taking care and rehabilitating workers who have been either injured in work accidents or have become ill due to various occupational diseases.

What is dangerous about this job?

- Hazard of contracting a communicable disease from sick patients
- Cuts and stings, as a result of using sharp tools, inc. scalpels and syringes
- Hazard of electrocution as a result of contact with defective electro-medical equipment
- Scalding and burns caused by working with disinfection and sterilization equipment
- Danger of being exposed to various chemicals while visiting/surveying industrial plants
- Physical and mental fatigue stemming from the specific conditions of this work
- Danger of being violently attacked by unsatisfied patients.

Hazards related to this job

Specific preventive measures can be seen by clicking on the respective  in the third column of the table.

Accident hazards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Falls, slips and trips, from high places or on the level 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being hit by falling objects; stepping on, colliding or being hit by an object; and/or being caught and squeezed between objects (esp. during plant visits) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cuts and stings, as a result of using sharp tools, inc. scalpels and syringes 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scalding and burns caused by boiling water and steam used for the disinfection and sterilization of equipment 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Injury to the leg, sole and toes as a result of heavy objects (e.g. medical instruments and equipment) falling on them 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrical shock from faulty or improperly grounded equipment, or due to faulty insulation. 	
Physical hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to scattered ionizing radiation emitted by x-ray machines and fluoroscopes while engaged in radiography and fluoroscopy 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exposure to ionizing and/or non-ionizing radiation emitted by various medical instruments used for the examination and treatment of patients. 	
<p>Chemical hazards</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skin-defatting, irritation and skin inflammation – due to frequent use of soap, detergents and disinfecting materials for hand-cleaning 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Irritation of eyes, nose and throat as a result of being exposed to solid aerosols containing various washing, cleaning and disinfecting materials (some of which are alkaline) and to drops of liquid cleaning solutions 	5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hazard of being exposed to various chemicals with which the occupational physician may be in touch during his field visits to various industrial plants 	6
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Latex allergy caused by contact with gloves and other medical products made of natural latex 	7
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skin allergy caused by powders inserted into gloves. 	
<p>Biological hazards</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hazard of contracting a communicable disease (transmitted by bacteria, viruses, fungi) as a result of close contact with and direct exposure to the patient throughout the medical examination 	8
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exposure to poisonous or allergenic plants (esp. at sites where the land wasn't effectively cleared from such plants) 	8 9
<p>Ergonomic, psychosocial and organizational factors</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental pressure and burnout stemming from direct contact with work accidents casualties and their families, and from contact with fatalities 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hazard of being violently attacked by victims of work-related injuries and/or by patients who contracted occupational diseases and are unhappy with the treatment they have received, with the limitations set upon them, with the workers' compensation settlement 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Danger of becoming addicted to drugs and tranquilizers due to the relative ease of obtaining them. 	

Preventive measures

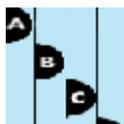
- 1 Throughout field-surveys of industrial plants use personal protection equipment, including safety helmets and shoes with non-skid soles
- 2 Sharp objects must be handled with extreme care; special receptacles, for storing used scalpels and syringe needles until final disposal, must be used
- 3 Electric circuit-breakers must be installed; in every case of suspect or defective equipment, order an inspection by a certified electrician
- 4 In situations of potential exposure to ionizing radiation wear a dosimeter attached to the body (film-badge or similar gadget); all radiation protection guidelines should be meticulously maintained in order to reduce exposure to the minimum

- 5 Safety goggles and eye-wash bottles or a eye-douche must be available
- 6 In zones where there are aerosols of hazardous chemicals or of chemicals with unknown properties, an air-conditioning system, with facilities for local and general ventilation, should be installed; it is required for reducing the heat-load, and for removal of gases, vapour and bad smells
- 7 Occupational physicians allergic to latex should use latex-free gloves and avoid touching other latex products
- 8 All safety instructions for prevention of exposure to pathogenic organisms transmitted through blood should be followed to the letter
- 9 It is essential to receive appropriate immunization according to need, and to adopt all universally accepted measures of hygiene

Specialized information

Synonyms Occupational health doctor; industrial-doctor; industry-doctor; occupational-doctor; "occupational-medicine expert".

Definitions and/or description



A Doctor of Occupational Medicine (occupational physician) is a general medical practitioner certified as an "occupational health expert" (Note 1), who works in "occupational medicine". Occupational physicians should understand relative place of occupational medicine within the national health system; he should have good knowledge of occupational medicine, including epidemiology (Note 2), and be familiar with work methodology and with the specific "work areas" within "occupational-medicine (Note 3). Duties may include: doing occupational anamnesis; organizing occupational clinics within the industrial plant; dealing with occupational legislation issues; determining presence of an occupational disease and the ability of the employee to continue doing his work; analysis of an industrial plant from the occupational hazard point of view; job analysis; occupational rehabilitation; occupational safety and hygiene; primary and occupational medicine; ergonomics; issue of permits and of worker limitations at work.

Related and specific occupations

Public health physician; epidemiologist; ergonomics expert; orthopedist; psychiatrist; specializing physician.

Tasks

Administering; advising; analyzing (findings, reports,...); approving; assembling (medical and occupational data); attending; caring; checking; consultation (with colleagues); determining (health status, ability to work,...); Diagnosing; discovering (risk factors); disinfecting & sterilizing; dressing; educating, instructing and teaching; evaluating (hazards, physical health, therapeutic methods,...); examining; explaining; fixing; guiding (nurses, residents,...); handling; immunizing; injecting; investigating; issuing (confirmations & recommendations); learning; measuring; organizing; operating (medical instrumentation); preventing; promoting; recognition & familiarization (the legal system, equipment and instruments, work methodology, follow up and monitoring,...); referring (to colleagues - for performing specific examinations); reporting; researching; supervising; updating; writing (anamnesis; prescriptions, reports, various articles and publications,...).

Primary equipment used

Computer; disinfection & sterilization equipment; laboratory equipment (basic); masks; medical supply (scalpels, rubber gloves, syringes, needles, bandages,...); microscope; monitoring equipment; scissors; sphygmomanometer; stethoscope; thermometers; tweezers; watches; x-ray machines.

Workplaces where the occupation is common

Governmental offices and medical/general institutes dealing with worker's health issues; Hospitals (certain wards); institutes of occupational research; national insurance institutes; private insurance companies; private and public occupational clinics (esp. in large industrial complexes); schools of medicine; sick funds.

Notes



1. The defined "fields of expertise" of the Occupational physician are: clinical (diseases and syndromes typical to occupational exposure); carrying out and understanding common occupational health examinations [such as lung function tests, audiometry, ergometry,...]; labour legislation; relations with other non medical organizations.

2. The methodology of occupational medicine includes: early recognition of risk factors; prevention of occupational diseases; promotion of health and occupational health education; occupational medicine records and administration. The specific areas of interest include the following: Pre-employment evaluation of worker's health, as well as periodical evaluations; Medical supervision of workers influenced by risk-factors; Evaluation of worker's work-potential; Rehabilitation of workers that contracted occupational disease or injury; Environmental health; Evaluation of the work environment.

References



1. Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety, 3rd Ed., ILO, Geneva, 1983.
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 6. Greenberg, M.I. et al: Occupational, Industrial, and Environmental Toxicology, Mosby Inc., 1997.
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