

OHG Standard

Setting the *standard* in Occupational Medicine

July 2002

Occupational Health Group is a service offered to the business community of North Alabama by Decatur General Hospital and Huntsville Hospital Systems

Post-Offer Evaluation - When and Why

Joseph L. Rea, M.D., M.P.H.

Post-Offer Evaluation takes its name and meaning from the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Under this important civil rights legislation, individuals challenged with physical or mental disabilities are given greater access to public facilities and transportation and to improved employment opportunities.



Under the law, job applicants cannot be asked about personal medical problems or undergo medical exams or testing before being first offered a job. Only then can medical evaluation be pursued. Thus, the term “post-offer” is used. Post-Offer Evaluation is done to avoid possible bias against individuals with

real or even suspected disability. It ensures that applicants are not rejected out of hand when they could actually do the job if given a reasonable accommodation.

A Post-Offer Evaluation typically includes gathering a medical history, performing a physical exam, and obtaining pertinent physiological measures such as blood tests. Increasingly, functional capacity testing is being applied that reflects the job itself. Functional Capacity Evaluations (FCE) are assessment tools that take objective measurements of those very movements or actions required of the job. For example, an applicant for a materials handling job could undergo an FCE to look at the range of bending and the amount of weight lifted. This information is valuable when matching the person and the job, since the FCE can uncover limitations that may make it unsafe to perform that particular job.

Evaluations can be general in nature or they can be tailored to specific work environments. General evaluations include a pre-placement exam, a review familiar to many employers. The aim is to understand the overall state of health of an individual by applying a general exam and testing before the job begins. This understanding can serve to alert the employer to problems that, frankly, would compromise an individual from safely performing the job in question. Information is available to shape a work restriction or an accommodation. If no reasonable accommodation can be developed, then the individual should probably not be placed in that job. An added benefit of a general

pre-placement evaluation is that it can detect problems previously unknown to the applicant. The applicant could then be referred to their personal physician for a closer medical work-up. Beyond this initial assessment, similar periodic evaluations over time can monitor the individual and observe changes.

Evaluation can also be specific. It may be customized to meet particular work or exposure situations. For example, individuals exposed to hazardous chemicals in the air may need to wear respirators. By testing pulmonary function and examining the lungs, a medical evaluation can determine physical ability to wear respirators. Similar repeat evaluations can monitor any decrement in their health. Many of these specific forms of evaluation are driven by governmental regulation and are prescribed based on the exposure in question, such as asbestos, loud noises, or various chemicals.



The need for specific evaluation can be triggered in the course of employment, since situations can obviously change over time. Employees may be injured or develop illnesses, or, as they age, their capacity for the job can become compromised. Conversely, jobs, themselves, can change. What was once doable takes on a different cast if cycles or production demands increase, for instance. Then, the individual could be hard-pressed to continue as before. If this happens, a fitness-for-duty evaluation comes into play. Individuals can then be medically assessed in light of the new job demands by utilizing a basic medical exam or an FCE. An evaluation can make clear if work restrictions are called



for to prevent work-related injuries based on current vulnerabilities of the employee. Results of the evaluation can then serve as a basis for safe job placement.

A Post-Offer Evaluation is a useful tool. Such an evaluation can discern the presence of medical problems and, to some degree, predict future problems. It can go beyond the immediate hiring period and last the duration of the working life of the employee with periodic monitoring or fitness-for-duty evaluation. A Post-Offer Evaluation provides a means of finding medical problems, assessing fitness, monitoring health changes, and guiding safety measures.

Success Story

OHG co-hosted its 4th Annual Occupational Health, Safety and Workers' Compensation Seminar on April 17th, 2002 at the Von Braun Center. The seminar was a tremendous success with over 450 people in attendance and 37 sponsors exhibiting. Attendees from as far away as Texas and several from Georgia, Mississippi and Tennessee took advantage of this informative seminar featuring 25 speakers and Col. Leon C. Schenck, Deputy Chief, Huntsville Police Department as guest luncheon speaker. The seminar offered the latest information on human resources, occupational medicine, safety, workers' compensation and regulatory issues. With the State of Alabama Department of Industrial Relations/Workers' Compensation Division and the Alabama Board of Nursing's endorsement, professionals were able to earn invaluable CEU credits. Other co-hosts included American Society of Safety Engineers, Alabama Chapter National Safety Council, Comp1One, and The Orthopaedic Center.

OHG Directory

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www.OHGonline.org

How to Select a Hearing Conservation Service Provider

Jennifer Eliason, M.S., COHC



According to the National Hearing Conservation Association (NHCA), when choosing a vendor to provide your audiometric testing, there are many key variables you should consider in your decision, regardless if you use a mobile testing unit or a clinic setting. First and foremost, testing personnel should be trained, experienced, and under supervision. Testing should be administered by an Occupational Hearing Conservationist (OHC) who is certified by the Council for Accreditation in Occupational Hearing Conservation (CAOHC). The OHC should work under the supervision of an audiologist or qualified physician, and all audiograms should be evaluated by an audiologist or qualified physician.

Secondly, consider the accuracy of the testing equipment. An annual exhaustive, electroacoustic calibration is required for each audiometer. Biological calibration and listening checks are required prior to each day of testing or whenever the mobile unit is moved (whichever is more frequent). The daily checks should ensure that the jacks and response button are inserted completely, the cords are in good shape, the headphone cushions are soft and pliant and without cracks, the audiometer intensifies and decreases tones appropriately, there is no static, and the tones are clear. During the testing, ambient (background) noise should be monitored continuously in the testing area using a bioacoustic simulator with room microphone attachment.

Thirdly, if using a mobile unit, safety factors need to be considered. Is the unit parked in a stable location? Does the unit run off of shore power instead of using generators, which are often very loud? Does the unit have wiring with voltage gauges to handle amperage draw for all on-board equipment?

Below is a list of questions to ask prospective vendors:

1. Can you provide me with a list of current and previous customers?
2. What experience do you have in audiometric testing?
3. What are the qualifications and training of your testing staff?
4. Who evaluates the audiograms?
5. Are ALL audiograms evaluated?
6. How many audiometric booths do you have?
7. What kind of report/results will I receive?
8. Do you provide notification letters for employees with shifts?
9. What do you charge per audiogram?
10. Do you provide educational training on hearing conservation?
11. Can I tour your clinic/mobile unit?

Lastly, your hearing conservation service provider should be more than a vendor. They should be your partner in hearing testing and hearing conservation issues. Selecting the right partner can be the most important decision you make regarding the hearing health of your employees. If you would like more information regarding audiometric testing, please contact OHG-Wellness Services at (256)864-3736.

HOLIDAY CLOSINGS:

All OHG offices will be closed in observance of the following holidays:

Thursday, July 4
Independence Day

Monday, September 2
Labor Day

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