

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

## Special Evaluations

by James F. Gauthier M.D., M.P.H., Medical Director Occupational Health Group



### INDEPENDENT MEDICAL EVALUATIONS

The purpose of an independent Medical Examination (IME) is generally to answer questions posed by the referring client. Clients who refer individuals for an IME can be employers, case managers, attorneys or others interested parties.

The IME seeks to determine answers to questions having to do with diagnoses, FMLA issues, date of maximal medical improvement, appropriateness of care, causal relationships, work relatedness, prognosis, permanent impairment, restrictions/accommodations for work, or other questions of interest.

The physician who performs an IME usually has not been involved in the treatment of the individual. Although not required, there is a certifying organization, the American Board of Independent Medical Examiners (ABIME) that certifies individuals through the process of continuing medical education and testing. Individuals with such certification have taken a special interest in both medical issues and work issues.

The quality of an IME is improved with a review of provided medical records that can include functional capacity evaluations, radiology reports, nerve conduction studies/EMG's, laboratory results and other related documents. Other documents such as injury reports, job descriptions, investigative reports, surveillance videos, and deposition transcripts can also be reviewed.

After reviewing the provided medical records and other related documents an evaluation of the individual is performed. The IME evaluation includes interviewing the individual (also known as taking a history), performing a physical examination, and finally, drafting a report to answer the questions posed by the referring party.

Case 1: PT is a 50-year-old female who has a history of previously diagnosed right carpal tunnel syndrome with surgical release in 2003 and who presents with a complaint of left hand numbness since November 2008. PT has worked in a factory packing parts weighing 3-4 pounds for a little over a year. She does not use hand tools. She does not need to forcefully grip or grasp objects. PT recently had left hand CTS confirmed by nerve conduction study performed by a neurologist. PT does not smoke, is on no medication and has no family history of CTS. PT presents for an IME to determine if her current job has played any role in the development of her left hand CTS and whether it is safe to continue working in her present position.

On physical exam PT stands 5 feet tall and weighs 170 pounds, giving her a BMI of 33.2 (normal is <25). PT describes the characteristic pattern of left hand numbness that can be recreated by keeping her wrist bent for one

minute, a test known as Phalen's test. Tingling is also elicited by tapping on the median nerve over the front of the wrist, a test known as Tinel's test.

PT and her employer are informed that the "pack out" job is considered low risk and safe with regard to the development of carpal tunnel syndrome. The job is not considered to be the cause or capable of aggravating PT's pre-existing condition. Though the work relatedness of carpal tunnel syndrome is quite controversial, most experts agree that certain activities must be present to place a worker at risk. Such activities include forceful gripping and grasping of a highly repetitive nature, maintaining awkward positions for prolonged periods of time, and the use of vibratory tools. PT's job has no such ergonomic risk factors. For most cases of CTS a cause can not be found. CTS appears to be a condition of middle age with the average age of onset of 50. Risk factors are many and include obesity, diabetes, autoimmune disease, hypothyroidism and many others.

### RETURN TO WORK EVALUATIONS

Return to work evaluations (RTW) are generally performed when issues of absenteeism, fitness for duty, the need for accommodation at work, the safety of the individual or coworkers is in question, or in cases that are difficult in some way.

Once again, specific questions are posed for the examiner to answer. The process is very similar to an independent medical examination but not generally as detailed. The examiner can be the patient's treating physician. Some companies have a policy that requires an employee submit to a return to work evaluation after absence of a specific number of days. For example, an absence of a week or longer may require an RTW evaluation. Other companies have other rules to determine whether such an evaluation takes place because those individuals hold safety sensitive positions.

Case #2: MI is a 51 year old truck driver who had a "light heart attack" one month previous. A single lesion was found in one of his coronary arteries which was stented. An echocardiogram obtain while hospitalized showed a normal ejection fraction. He has experienced no more chest pain. He is referred to OHG to determine when he can RTW. A review of the cardiologist's records reveals that MI sustained very little damage to the heart. Using the DOT Cardiovascular Advisory Panel Guidelines, MI is allowed to RTW 8 weeks following his heart attack after the successful completion of a treadmill test.

As illustrated above, special evaluations such as IMEs and RTW exams can assist employers answer many important questions regarding their most important assets, their employees!



#### DECATUR

1615 Kathy Lane SW  
Decatur, AL 35603  
Phone: (256) 353-4325  
Fax: (256) 922-2531

#### HUNTSVILLE

1963 Memorial Parkway  
Suite 24  
Huntsville, AL 35801  
Phone: (256) 265-7000  
Fax: (256) 265-7007

#### MADISON

9238 Madison Boulevard  
Building 1, Ste. 200  
Madison, AL 35758  
Phone: (256) 774-7300  
Fax: (256) 922-2532

#### WELLNESS

6767 Old Madison Pike  
Building 4, Ste. 400  
Huntsville, AL 35806  
Phone: (256) 922-6699  
Fax: (256) 922-6660

## OHG Launches iSolas!

In order to provide even better service to our clients, OHG has launched its newest application to give employers greater access to their employees records information. iSolas is a web-based application that will allow approved administrators to go online to view results, provider notes, medication lists, etc., through the OHG website. We have been Beta-testing this application and the reviews have been very positive. The potential advantages for our clients are numerous:

- Instant access to employee records, test results, doctor's notes, immunization reports, etc.
- No more having to wait for the fax or mail to receive results, or having to run to the fax machine to make certain that only the appropriate people receive the results.
- An end to having to contact the clinic and request duplicate information to send to the insurance carrier or if some information is lost.

In order to sign up for this new service, please contact our Marketing Representatives, Andrea Calloway (256-922-6677) for the Huntsville/Madison area and Audra Campbell (256-655-5704) for the Decatur/Madison area.



What people generally want for the Holidays

### Surviving Holiday Stress



What people generally get for the Holidays

The holiday season is quickly approaching. You may be excited and enthusiastic, or you may be anxious and exhausted. The holidays can be a wonderful time of year but often extremely stressful. Dateline NBC and Prevention Magazine conducted a poll in 1996 to see how people view the holidays. 41% of those polled stated that Christmas and Hanukkah were stressful, as stressful as asking the boss for a raise. Money was viewed as the #1 cause of stress, with 34% saying they worried about money during the holidays. And women were more likely than men to feel "stressed out" during the holidays.

Where does holiday stress come from? Generally speaking, the 2 biggest sources of holiday stress come from our unrealistic expectations and from over-scheduling. The perfect holiday is an illusion. And the quest for perfection is guaranteed to end in frustration and disappointment, because nothing will measure up. One problem is trying to please everyone or do everything for everybody. The fact is you can't please everyone, you can't do it all, and you can't be all things to all people. So take that burden off your shoulders. We want to make sure that everyone has the happiest holiday ever, but ultimately they are responsible for enjoying themselves. Focus on the real meaning of the holidays: gathering with family, connecting with friends and participating in tradition.

Also, don't put too much pressure on yourself to be perfect. The house doesn't have to be spotless. Not every meal has to be prepared from scratch. It's really okay to go out and buy the dessert instead of cooking your own cake or pie. And, this is not the time to try out new gourmet recipes for a holiday party. Remember this phrase: "Dare to be average". Give yourself permission to be less than perfect. You will enjoy your holidays much more if you do.

Another holiday stressor comes from over-scheduling or over-committing ourselves. During the holidays we often try to do too much. If your list of holiday activities every year is too long, you have to recognize that you can't do everything, do it well and enjoy doing it. You have to make choices. For example, baking cookies can be fun, but baking 20 varieties at the last minute can be exhausting. Keep things simple for yourself. Also, you can lower your stress level by remembering a simple 2-letter word: NO. If you are saying "yes" to some people, who are you saying "no" to? Some things in life we are obligated to do. In other cases, though, we can say no. During the holidays don't lose sight of what is really important to you: spending time with loved ones. When saying no to a request, keep it short and simple: "I'm going to have to say no. I promised my family we'd spend more time together this month". You may feel a little awkward at first. But remember this too is your holiday to enjoy.

### OHG Directory

Administration.....	(256) 922-6675
Marketing and Business Development.....	(256) 922-6677
Billing Department.....	(256) 922-6673
OHG - Huntsville.....	(256) 265-7000
OHG - Madison.....	(256) 774-7300
OHG - Decatur.....	(256) 353-4325
Wellness Services.....	(256) 922-6699

[www.OHGonline.org](http://www.OHGonline.org)

### Holiday Closings

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

<b>Thanksgiving</b>	<b>November 26th &amp; 27th</b>
<b>Christmas</b>	<b>December 24th &amp; 25th</b>
<b>New Year's</b>	<b>December 31st &amp; January 1st</b>



#### DECATUR

1615 Kathy Lane SW  
Decatur, AL 35603  
Phone: (256) 353-4325  
Fax: (256) 922-2531

#### HUNTSVILLE

1963 Memorial Parkway  
Suite 24  
Huntsville, AL 35801  
Phone: (256) 265-7000  
Fax: (256) 265-7007

#### MADISON

9238 Madison Boulevard  
Building 1, Ste. 200  
Madison, AL 35758  
Phone: (256) 774-7300  
Fax: (256) 922-2532

#### WELLNESS

6767 Old Madison Pike  
Building 4, Ste. 400  
Huntsville, AL 35806  
Phone: (256) 922-6699  
Fax: (256) 922-6660