



# **Manual of assignment**

## **Taking an occupational history**

**Ghent, September 2011**

## Manual of the assignment in the framework of EMUTOM

### Taking an occupational history

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences  
Academic year 2011-2012  
E-line 1st Master Medicine  
Partim Work and Health  
Ghent University, Belgium

#### Objectives

The goal of this student assignment is to practice and to assess the extent to which you acquired the knowledge and skills on work and health related issues pursued during the previous years (Bachelor in Medicine) and the present academic year. You will process different topics through the elaboration of a particular real life case. In practice this means that you will have to interview an employee/patient and report orally and in written on your findings.

This manual describes step by step how you will have to fulfill this assignment and what is expected from you.

#### Knowledge objectives

- The student explains the specific role, tasks and responsibilities of the occupational health services and occupational physician.
- The student reproduces the general structure/organisation of occupational health and the access to occupational health services.
- Students recognize potential exposure to hazards and risks in a specific workplace.
- Students give advice on possible preventive measures and fitness for work.
- The student provides an understanding of how law affects the practice of occupational health.
- The student outlines the systems regarding possible benefits and compensation relating to work related health issues.
- The student follows the reporting guidelines for compensation.

#### Skills

- The student takes an occupational history.
- The student applies his communication skills in the practice of occupational medicine.

- Students find reliable sources (e.g. Pubmed) and get acquainted with specialist literature in the field of occupational medicine and health (work related risks, health effects and preventive measures, reintegration...).
- The student identifies the (inter)national key organizations (e.g. WHO, ILO, Labour inspection... ) that play a role in occupational health care.
- The student realizes that one must work in a multi-disciplinary team to achieve an optimal solution to certain health problems and/or to achieve behavioral change.

### Attitude

- The student develops an active interest in occupational medicine and its relationship to his day-to-day work.
- The student is attentive to the work context of a patient during a consultation session.
- Students adopt a preventive attitude when considering work and health issues.
- The student shows an ethical and deontological attitude when considering work and health issues.

### **Description of the assignment / (real patient) case study**

According to the group (1, 2, ....16) you are assigned to for the current academic year, you will get a particular case study. At forehand you will receive a brief description, recommended reading and specific questions that must be solved in group.

**Scenario:** four sessions including the interview:

#### Plenary Introductory session 1

First, a general introduction on the structure and organization of occupational health in Belgium is presented. The goals of occupational health care are explained to all students groups.

Second, the assignment is introduced : the objectives, the process, the reporting and evaluation are described and explained. A list of useful reference material and reference sources will be made available (online).

By reading at forehand the recommended literature and documentation, you can prepare yourself for the next session.

#### Session 2

In order to have a fruitful discussion and preparation of the interview bring all relevant documentation (made available online) with you!!

This is a small group session introduced and supervised by an occupational physician (OP).

First, the OP explains his daily practice to the students, describes some problems and challenges he encounters, ...

Second, the case will be presented briefly to the students. The students get the opportunity to exchange ideas about the assignment (and in general about OM). The further preparation for the interview happens here: division of tasks, elaboration of the interview (additional questions), the collected/recommended literature/documentation is discussed, some responses are formulated...

### Session 3

During this session in small groups, the interview of the employee takes place. The entire group is present at the interview but by preference one or two students are appointed as moderator, as interviewer, as reporter etc. (See practical approach below). Afterwards, the received answers and important elements from the interview will be processed into a written report and an oral presentation. (See below).

### Session 4

This session involves the oral presentation of the assignment/case and the interview to fellow students : each group presents its own case to another group and to 2 to 3 examiners. This is followed by a question and answer period and the possibility to receive/give feedback. (See more information below).

<b>Practical approach of the interview.</b>
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The key questions for every physician in her / his consulting hour regarding work and health : Acronym:  
**WARP**

**W**ork: could the work of the patient be (part of) the cause or the aggravation of his/her complaint / disease? (Effect of work on health)

**A**ctivities: could the complaint / disease of the patient have consequences for his/her activities and participation in work (Fitness for work)

**R**eferral: should / can I refer my patient to an occupational physician or another specialist  
(Structure / legislation / roles)

**P**revention: Can I do something to prevent the (return of the) complaint / disease?

- The first focus of the interview is taking an **occupational history**.

As a guide you can use the basic scheme of an occupational history taking already seen in the textbook of the third year.

These are the following basic questions about occupational history (ABC of Work Related Disorders: HAZARDS OF WORK van David Snashall) :

1. What is your job? What do you do for a living?
2. What do you work with? What is a typical working day for you? What do you actually do at work?
3. How long have you been doing this kind of work? Have you done any other work in the past?
4. Have you been told that anything you use at work may make you ill? Has anybody at work had the same symptoms?
5. Do you have any hobbies (do-it-yourself or gardening) that may bring you into contact with chemicals (or exposures in the household)?
6. Is there an occupational health doctor or nurse at your workplace (who you can contact)?

When presuming a work-related disease or condition, additional questions can be used to elaborate more complex cases. Examples of more detailed questions are given below.

You can discuss and formulate more questions during the session with the OP.

7. When and how did the symptoms start in relation to exposure?
8. What was the intensity and the duration of the exposure to the risk(s)?
9. When are the symptoms at their worst and when are they at their best? Are they improved after a weekend off work, or better still after a fortnight's holiday?
10. Are there any collective control measures e.g. local exhaust ventilation?
11. Do you wear personal protection equipment e.g. gloves, mask?

Examples of questionnaires can be found on Minerva e.g. MassCOSH; Addressing work-related injuries and illnesses : a guide for primary care providers in Massachusetts, 2004; and Taking an Occupational History by Raymond Agius, <http://www.agius.com/hew/resource/occhist.htm>;

It is suggested to ask also additional relevant questions specifically related to your case. For example ask and report the relevant elements of family and personal medical history to the work-related problems.

➤ Other learning objectives are mentioned above and should be applied/used depending on your assigned case

- Limitation in functional capabilities and performance of daily activities
- Participation in (own) work possible
- Problems in work and work environment.
- Adapting work hours and tasks, other adjustments
- Gradual return to work
- Financial compensations. Benefits.
- Referral to other experts.Treatment.
- ....

<b>The moment of contact with the employee:</b>
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- Introduce yourself and your role (moderator, questioner,...) : you can even make a nameplate or put a sticker with your name on your t-shirt, blouse,...
- Explain again the reason of this interview. Try to reassure the employee.
- Note that the employee should be treated with the necessary courtesy and respect. A proper ethical attitude is expected from the student. Medical confidentiality must be preserved at all times. Emphasize that you will respect the privacy concerning the obtained (medical) data. Discuss this with the employee who you will interview. He will greatly appreciate this and it will result in better interviews in which everything can be discussed.
- Avoid offensive (or too suggestive) questions.
- In case of emergency or problems, there will be a contact person : your teacher or an assistant or the secretariat will be available/stand-by (at least by phone) during the interview.
- Consider that the interview may last up to two hours.
- At the end, express your gratitude towards the employee.

## Reporting and oral presentation

### ❖ **Written report:**

Be sure that your report and answers are as complete as possible. Check the learning objectives!

The report should at least include the following items:

- Number of the group and names of the students.
- Name of the OP, brief description of the occupational health service, tasks and responsibilities of the practitioner in occupational medicine who led the second session.
- Description of the methodology (including the search strategy in the literature...), the data collected during the interview and the answers to the general and specific questions.  
This can be supplemented with e.g. epidemiological data on the issue, causes or determinants of the problem, legislation, proposals to approach and prevent this kind of work-related problems,...
- Personal comments (about the case, the assignment, in general about OM, ...) and critical reflection.
- References to all sources and scientific literature consulted during the (preparatory) work.
- Division of the workload and the tasks performed by each member of the group.
- The report is signed by everyone (in agreement).

Some further requirements:

- The required length of the report: 5 to 10 pages – character size 12, single spacing.
- The privacy of the interviewed person should not be violated. Therefore, it is advised to use initials (besides indicating the sex and age of the person).
- The written report should be delivered in duplicate to the secretariat.

### ❖ **Presentation in groups, to fellow students and examiners:**

- Requested duration of the presentation: 20 minutes.
- Each group presents its own case. By preference this will be done by 1 or 2 students.
- This is followed by a question and answer period both by the examiners (OPs) and the other students (10 to 15 minutes).

- You will also receive feedback on the form and content from the examiners/OPs after the oral presentation.
- Attending the presentation of another student group is required (learning from others, interactive learning experience). (See schedule on the timetable)

### Evaluation by the teacher

The overall evaluation results in a group score, based on:

- Attendance of the sessions in small groups (n=3) is mandatory
- The written report
- The oral presentation

Manifest differences in individual effort can lead to differences in individual scoring!

If for some valid reason you can not attend a certain compulsory session, then the general agreements of the Medical Education Committee apply (inform curriculum manager and if necessary medical certificate).

Unjustified absence will be included in your score or result OR is charged in your total score.

### Evaluation by the student

This student assignment is part of a European project on Teaching Occupational Medicine to undergraduate students. At the beginning of the introductory session and at the end of the fourth session you will be asked to fill in a self-efficacy questionnaire in OM. In this way you help us to review and evaluate this teaching module and more specifically this assignment.

### Contact

For problems or questions about the student assignment you can contact the secretariat of Professor L. Braeckman.

Contact:

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## Sources of information

### 1. Institutes and organisations

#### 1.1. National: Belgium

- Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue (FOD Werkgelegenheid, Arbeid en Sociaal Overleg – SPF Emploi, Travail et Concertation Sociale)  
[www.employment.belgium.be](http://www.employment.belgium.be) - [www.werk.belgie.be](http://www.werk.belgie.be) – [www.emploi.belgique.be](http://www.emploi.belgique.be)
- Fund of Occupational Diseases (Fonds voor Beroepsziekten - Fonds des Maladies Professionnelles)  
[www.fmp-fbz.fgov.be](http://www.fmp-fbz.fgov.be)
- Fund of Occupational Accidents (Fonds voor Arbeidsongevallen - Fonds des Accidents du travail)  
[www.faofat.fgov.be](http://www.faofat.fgov.be)

#### 1.2. International

- European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (Europees Agentschap voor Veiligheid en Gezondheid op het Werk)  
<http://be.osha.eu.int/> - <http://europe.osha.eu.int/> - <http://osha.europa.eu/en/about>
- WHO - World Health Organization (Wereldgezondheidsorganisatie)  
<http://www.who.dk/> (WHO Europe) en [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)
- ILO (International Labour Office)  
<http://www.ilo.org>

- International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH)  
[www.icohweb.org](http://www.icohweb.org)

## 2. Journals

- American Industrial Hygiene Association Journal  
<http://www.aiha.org>
- Occupational and Environmental Medicine  
<http://oem.bmjournals.com/>
- Scandinavian Journal of Work Environment & Health  
<http://www.sjweh.fi>
- International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health  
<http://www.springerlink.com/content/0340-0131>
- International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health  
<http://www.ijoehe.com>
- Occupational Medicine  
[www.occmed.oupjournals.org](http://www.occmed.oupjournals.org)
- Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine  
<http://www.joem.org/>

## 3. Information sites (+ links)

- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety  
<http://www.ccohs.ca>
- CDC : Centers of disease control and prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov/>
- HSE: Health and Safety Executive of the United Kingdom  
<http://www.hse.gov.uk>

- FIOH : Finnish Institute of Occupational Health  
<http://www.ttl.fi/en/Pages/default.aspx>
- IARC : International agency for Research on Cancer  
<http://www.iarc.fr/>
- INRS: Institut National de Recherche et de Sécurité France  
<http://www.inrs.fr>
- Health risks from chemicals  
<http://www.coshh-essentials.org.uk>
- NIOSH: National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health  
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh>
- Material Safety Data Sheets  
<http://www.ilpi.com/msds/index.html>