



Sheffield Occupational Health Advisory Service (SOHAS)

Working to Prevent and Alleviate the Effects of Work on Health



Sheffield Occupational Health Advisory Service (SOHAS) is
a voluntary organisation and a registered charity.

SOHAS is funded by
Sheffield Primary Care Trust • Section 64 (Department of Health)

SOHAS is an accredited training provider
for Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

SOHAS is part of the following networks
The Sheffield Health and Work Strategy Group • Sheffield First for Health and Well-being Partnership •
National Work and Health Network • National Employment and Health Innovations Network • Hazards Campaign

SOHAS resources
www.sohas.co.uk • www.whig.org.uk • SOHAS Library and Information Service

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The Workplace Health Programme

SOHAS Occupational Health Advisers work in one in three GP practices in Sheffield and receive referrals from all other practices. How has this primary care based occupational health service developed over the past year?

Stress and mental health

Helping patients with stress and mental health problems has continued to grow as part of our work. This probably reflects changes in patterns of referral rather than an underlying increase in the incidence of mental ill-health, as our service in this area has become better known. Fully half of all our clients come to see us with mental health problems, up from 40% in 2005-06.

As part of our planned response to this, we have set up a training programme to equip advisers with the knowledge and skills to deal with work-related mental health problems effectively.

Also, as a relatively small service acting at one of the 'nodes' in the system, from which patients are referred to other providers, we have initiated and taken part in networking activities through the Health and Work Strategy Group. Whether patients are stressed by work or depressed by not

working, there are a number of organisations and programmes available to help them. We need good contact with and between organisations to use limited resources efficiently.

SOHAS has obtained funding from the Department of Health to provide systematic support for patients with mental health problems on GP lists. This project is due to start later in 2007.

Audiometry

Almost 50% of adult on-set deafness in men and 25% in women is related to noise at work. Of people with deafness of any kind, limitations at work are amongst the most common causes of presentation in primary care. SOHAS advisers have been carrying out audiometry in primary care for 25 years.

The start of a commissioning role for practices through the seven Practice-Based Commissioning Consortia (PBCCs) – groups of practices that will seek providers of services for their patients – gives us an opportunity. We can help PBCCs to ensure that only people with significant hearing problems are referred to specialist Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) services. Early results of carrying out this service suggest that

almost half of people referred for audiometry do not need to be seen in ENT departments.

We are keen to discuss with PBCCs how potential savings could help to fund the expansion of our service.

Return to work

More than a third of patients referred to us are employed and off-sick. Along with people who are unemployed, almost half our work concerns returns to work or work transitions (to training, retirement, unemployment or long-term ill-health benefits). Government policy calls for much clearer communication between primary care (GP surgeries), where most sick notes are signed, and employers, as well as more structured sickness absence management and rehabilitation in the workplace. Our advisers visit workplaces to help patients to return to work and write letters to employers suggesting how to expedite returns to work. There has been national interest in our work from the government's National Director for Health and Work, Dame Carol Black.

One of the outstanding and unresolved needs for help is in the provision of careers advice and guid-

Who gets stressed?

Of patients referred with stress, some jobs are more common than others:

- ▷ We have received more referrals than expected from managers, health and social care jobs, shop workers.
- ▷ We have received less referrals than expected from construction, steel and manufacturing workers.

But what does this mean?

Stress is widely reported across all forms of work but is better recognised in some jobs, such as management and health care, than in others. There may be more stressors in these jobs too. Health care workloads are increasing. Management style has changed across health care and in retail more than in some other sectors; this affects managers and staff alike.

HEADLINE FIGURES: 1100 PATIENTS SEEN

Areas of law that help patients most
Employment law, health and safety law, Disability Discrimination Act and law of tort (civil damages)

Is occupational health men's health?
Over 50% of patients seen are men

Benefits advice

We are specialist advisers on industrial injuries and diseases. We gave advice to almost 400 patients about benefits last year — most were referred on to other agencies for help. We dealt with over 100 industrial injury and disease claims.

ance for adults with chronic limiting health problems. A Neighbourhood Renewal Fund financed project will help us to provide some limited advice in practice settings this year.

Cancer caused by work

15-20,000 people die from cancer caused by work each year in the UK, if international estimates are applied to the UK population. Yet few

are compensated or recorded by the Coroner as industrial deaths. Careful occupational history taking in primary care is starting to bridge this very large gap in the statistics.

Through audit of patients with bladder cancer, a number of jobs involving exposure to carcinogens (cancer-causing chemicals) have been identified. This work has attracted national attention; the

Health and Safety Executive is carrying out a prevention campaign as part of its Disease Reduction Programme.

It is of particular importance that some of the jobs in which exposure to carcinogens occur, still exist and are carried out in the same way as before. Good history-taking in this area of health can lead directly to prevention of cases in the future.

Awards for All

In May 2006 we received £5,000 funding from Big Lottery Awards for All to develop four training packages aimed at the voluntary sector on Basic Health and Safety, Manual Handling, Risk Assessment and Stress.

The work, carried out by SOHAS Adviser Kieran Dowling, was in response to feedback we received from the Workers' Safety Adviser Challenge Fund Project that we carried out from 2004-2006.

In order to establish the most appropriate subjects, we surveyed the voluntary sector to gain a better understanding of their training needs. The outcomes of the survey showed voluntary sector organisations were concerned about how to carry out risk assessments and how to manage stress.

We are now in a position where we can support the voluntary sector in a more effective way than before the award of the grant. This will help and enable the organisation to deliver much more focused training to the community groups who need support in risk assessment and health and safety training.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE BACK INTO WORK: The Work and Well-being Project

The Work and Well-being Project was aimed at helping people in Sheffield with health problems who are on Incapacity Benefit to become ready for work. It was a partnership between the Sheffield City Council Employment Unit, Deploy and ourselves, funded by Jobcentre Plus and Objective One.

Our role was to provide an assessment of the readiness of people to return to work once they had received the appropriate help to manage their health. We were also responsible for referring people to a condition management programme which helped people with long-term health problems with the help of psychological and physiotherapy support, provided by Sheffield Care Trust and The Physios respectively.

Our involvement ran from January 2006 until the end of March 2007. 144 people were inducted into the project, of which 24 were direct referrals by SOHAS Occupational Health Advisers from patients seen in GP surgeries. 58 people were referred for condition management (30 mental health, 28 physiotherapy) and 45 people found jobs. This project was important in testing out ways of helping people on Incapacity Benefit to return to work, a critical part of the government strategy in assisting benefit claimants into work.

SOHAS Library and Information Service

The SOHAS library is a specialised resource for people requiring information on problems associated with, or the prevention of, work-related ill health. Although aimed primarily at professionals with an interest in occupational health, it is also open to anyone who lives or works in Sheffield and needs help or advice. The library has information on hazards at work, occupational diseases, health and safety law, and safer ways to work. The library is open Monday to Friday, 10.00am to 4.00pm. If you would like to use the library you should contact us first to arrange a suitable time, by telephoning 0114 275 5760.

Health and safety information can also be accessed through the SOHAS and Workers Health and Information Gateway (WHIG) websites. The SOHAS website contains links to our publications, both for patients and professionals, and also gives details of how and where to contact our occupational health advisers. You can visit the website at: www.sohas.co.uk

The WHIG website contains resources on issues relating to workplace health and also has a section on returning to work, the Rehab Hub, which health practitioners can use to signpost patients to the most appropriate service providers across the city to access the help and advice they need. You can visit the WHIG website at: www.whig.org.uk



The Sheffield Health and Work Strategy Group

The Sheffield Health and Work Strategy Group which is made up of representatives from the Voluntary Sector, NHS and Public Sector and is funded by Section 64, Department of Health, has continued to develop its work.

The group's work over the past 12 months included:

- ▷ 'Managing Mental Health Problems at Work' an event promoting recent guidelines from the British Occupational Health Research Foundation (BOHRF) practitioners.
- ▷ An away day to review the job retention and rehabilitation pilot evaluation for which SOHAS was the lead contractor for the Sheffield area.
- ▷ Engaging with the Pathways to Work implementation team, a Condition Management Programme rolled out across Sheffield in December 2006. Members of the Sheffield Health and Work Strategy Group now sit on the Condition Management steering group and Clinical Governance sub groups.
- ▷ "5 Steps to Health and Work: A partnership approach" a Yorkshire and Humber regional event that looked at issues around partnership and cross referrals between practitioners and service providers.

The Workplace Health Information Project

SOHAS Publications

In the last year of this Section 64, Department of Health funded project we have continued to produce new publications and revise existing information leaflets.

New publications for patients

- ▷ Older workers
- ▷ Return to work
- ▷ How does stress cause heart disease and raise blood pressure?
- ▷ Working with computers

Revised publications

- ▷ Mothers at Work series (*This series has been revised in line with changes in legislation which became effective on 01 April 2007*).
- ▷ Off sick? What happens & when?
- ▷ Feeling the heat
- ▷ Workplace Stress – Practical Solutions
- ▷ Do you have occupational asthma?
- ▷ Work-related Cancer
- ▷ Manual Handling in Kitchens
- ▷ Working Hours and Health
- ▷ Cold work
- ▷ Your skin at work

Publications for health professionals

Update 24: Best practice in helping patients return to work.

We also have advice materials available in the following languages.

Arabic • Bangla • Chinese • Polish • Slovak • Somali • Urdu

You can obtain a copy of any SOHAS publication by contacting our office or by downloading them from our website: www.sohas.co.uk

TRUSTEES' REPORT

As described elsewhere in this report, SOHAS's work has continued to develop in a number of ways over the past year. Two areas are worth special mention. Of particular interest is the Work and Wellbeing Project, which is an approach to managing ill health among people of working age that has moved up the agenda of Central Government over the past twelve months. It is a departure from our normal core activity undertaken through the Workplace Health Programme and provides a good example of how a broad based approach to the issues of health and work is becoming more important.

Another significant impact on SOHAS's work has been the rise in the number of clients with mental health problems. It is not possible to attribute this to any single cause, but it is clear that influencing factors such as the growing awareness of stress at work and the withdrawal of Primary Care Trust mental health counselling services have contributed to the increase.

This area of work requires additional skills from our Advisers and a training programme is being set up over the next twelve months to ensure that the organisation is able to provide the most effective service to these clients.

The Trustees would like to thank SOHAS staff, partners and funders for their involvement in another successful year for the organisation.

MANAGER

Nick Pearson

STAFF

Neil Boulton • Razia Din • Kieran Dowling
Colin Ellis • Kathryn Hindmarch
Simon Pickvance • Maeve Stevenson
Adel Taylor • Veronica Yeardeley

TRUSTEES

Peter Bodsworth • Adrian Budgen
Anne Giller • Yehuda Kaplan
Jessica Tweney

ASSOCIATES

Michelle Garrigan • Carolynne Radcliffe

LEAVERS

Nasim Ali • Jillian Creasy (Trustee)
Ian Fletcher • Rowan Merewood
Andy Turner • Paul White

SOHAS

3rd Floor Queen's Building
55 Queen Street Sheffield S1 2DX
Tel: +44 (0)114 275 5760
Fax: +44 (0)114 249 1883
Email: sohas@sohas.co.uk
www.sohas.co.uk