

# HealthWorks

A newsletter of Tri State Occupational Health for its employers



## Occupational Evaluations are vital to your company's health

by Michael Stenberg, M.D., Tri-State Occupational Health

In the realm of Occupational Medicine, there are a number of evaluations that assist employers with preventive and post injury/illness care.

It is important to understand how these evaluations help your organization hire the right employee, match physical demands to abilities of the employee, and assure injured employees are ready to return.

Evaluations minimize the potential for employees being injured, reduce lost time and absenteeism, and minimize organizational risks.

**Pre placement/post offer examinations** assist in determining whether an employee is capable of performing their job. There are many types of pre placement/post offer examinations. The success of these evaluations depends on identifying physical demands of the job, assuring that validation studies and legal reviews have been completed, verifying that testing is functional in nature, and assuring that testing meets ADA requirements.

**Fit for Duty Examinations** are utilized to determine when an employee who has been off work with illness/injury can safely return to the physical demands and essential functions of the job. This type of testing is important when employers are unsure of the

employee's abilities when they are released to return to work from a personal injury or illness. For this testing, the physician utilizes the physical demands of the job and assesses the patient's functional ability in relationship to those demands. It helps minimize the possibility of sustaining an injury or returning to work too soon.

**Functional Capacity Evaluation** is a comprehensive musculoskeletal evaluation used to determine the validity of a person's performance. A Functional Capacity Evaluation is performed when it is necessary to determine the person's level of ability, feasibility of returning to his/her regular job, whether accommodations are indicated, and validity of the individual's complaints.

**Independent Medical Examinations (IMEs)** are an important component of worker compensation systems, and are also used to clarify other disability or liability associated cases. The evaluation is performed by a physician not involved in the care of the person being examined. It is utilized to clarify clinical and case issues. Impairment evaluations are often used to provide a more objective understanding of the impact of an injury or illness.

**Impairment Ratings** in Iowa are completed according to the AMA Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment. The guides provide physicians with a consistent method of evaluation resulting in reproducible results. They are used to determine the percentage of impairment a person has, and should only be completed after the person has reached Maximum Medical Improvement (MMI). Impairment ratings are different than disability examinations and should be completed by an unbiased physician who has been trained in utilizing the guides. A person can be rated as having impairment but not be disabled.

**Disability Evaluations** may be requested by the state to assist the



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Disability Determination Bureau to determine if a person is disabled.

These are specialized evaluations and the physician must review past medical records in addition to performing a detailed examination of the body systems.

When choosing providers to complete these examinations, it is important to ask if they are Certified Independent Medical Examiners. These are credentialed physicians who have passed special testing. Credentials are a reliable indicator of the physician's capacity to complete independent medical and impairment evaluations according to performance standards.

Board certification and certification in special evaluations demonstrates the provider's commitment to the community and the people they serve. With the sensitive nature of these evaluations and potential

## Here is what Dubuque employers had to say

In a random survey of Dubuque area employers conducted by the National Association of Occupational Health Providers, Tri State Occupational Health scored higher than national averages in **all** of the following areas: quality of service, appointment availability, patient waiting time, billing services, locations, staff professionalism and courtesy, written and verbal communication, diagnosis and medical treatment, after-hours care, pricing, facilitating early return to work on full or modified duty, and familiarity with services. In the survey, TSOH scored higher than Finley Business Health / VitaCare and Westside in all categories. This data can give you great confidence that if you are working with TSOH, you are working with the Dubuque regional leader in occupational medicine.

for legal intervention, the decision to work with certified providers reduces your risk and increases validity and reproducibility of the examinations.

When organizations understand testing available in the Occupational Health realm, they tend to make more informed decisions and intervene more appropriately when employees are injured.

Utilizing these evaluations allows the employer greater ability to successfully match an employee to the job and assure the employee can meet the physical demands initially and post injury. Partnering with your Occupational Health provider for Total Health Management of your organization is one more way to reduce cost, increase employee satisfaction, and retain staff.

## Drug testing regulations updated

On July 30, 2009, ODAPC published a Final Rule in the Federal Register which restores mandatory direct observation (DO) collections for all return-to-duty and follow-up testing. This DO drug testing rule is applicable to return-to-duty, safety-sensitive transportation industry employees who have already failed or refused to take a prior drug test.

The start date for mandatory DO for return-to-duty and follow-up testing is August 31, 2009. All employees who go for return-to-duty and follow-up tests on and after the effective date must have their collections observed. This includes employees currently in follow-up testing programs who will still be in those programs on and after August 31st.

You can link to the Final Rule on the Federal Register website at: <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/pdf/E9-18156.pdf>

*Tri-State Occupational Health (TSOH) provides Total Health Management for employers, and assists organizations in identifying their occupational health, safety, preventive, and wellness needs. Dr. Stenberg is a specialist in Occupational & Environmental Medicine who practices at TSOH. He is board certified in Occupational Medicine and Aerospace Medicine, and is a Certified Independent Medical Examiner and a Certified Medical*

### Partners in Wellness

#### Dan Focht Coordinator of Therapy Services



Dan Focht has been with Tri State Occupational Health for nine years. Dan is devoted to treating the injured worker and the many intricacies involved in treatment approach(es). He recognizes that communication is vital to maintaining the high level of care that Tri State Occupational Health has attained. Dan takes pride in providing the best care for the injured worker.

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## HealthWorks

*HealthWorks is published by Tri State Occupational Health for its employers. The purpose of Tri State Occupational Health is to provide you with resources and information to make your workplace safe and healthy. Contact Deb Poppe at (563) 584-4606 or [dpoppe@mahealthcare.com](mailto:dpoppe@mahealthcare.com) for more information.*

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