

Standards and Voluntary Accreditation for Occupational Health Services

You may recall that late last year we established a stakeholder group to help develop standards and a system of voluntary accreditation for occupational health services. There has been intense activity gathering information, benchmarking against other schemes, consulting with colleagues and preparing and revising draft standards.

The standards are intended to be applicable to all types and size of occupational health services including in-house and outsourced. Developing a one-size-fits-all set of standards is ambitious yet I am pleased to say that our aim appears to be true.

In the draft you will see that each domain has standards with minimum requirements. Standards are expressed as something which occupational health services "must" do as an overriding duty of principle, in order to demonstrate that they meet the requirements for accreditation.

Minimum requirements relate to statutory or professional responsibilities and must be met to satisfy the standards. Each minimum requirement is accompanied by examples of suitable evidence. These are records that applicants may use to demonstrate that they meet the minimum requirements. The examples are illustrative and are not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive. Wherever possible we want people to be able to submit evidence that they gather as part of existing processes.

Accreditation will be a voluntary process. It aims to credit the good work being done by high quality OH services, providing independent validation that they satisfy standards. Accreditation will also help to raise standards where they need to be raised and help purchasers differentiate OH services according to robust standards.

I envisage that after consultation and pilot testing that the final standards will be published toward the turn of the year. It is important to invest considerable additional time and thought exploring and determining the most appropriate method for verifying accreditation. Therefore accreditation will not be available until the second half of 2010 at the earliest. However, the standards will be published in advance of the launch of accreditation to allow those organisations who wish to apply for accreditation to start working to the standards.

I appreciate the interest and support of everyone who has provided feedback thus far. I encourage all members to review the final consultation draft and to provide feedback and suggestions that you consider to be relevant.



Paul J Nicholson
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