

Delivering occupational healthcare – just like ABC



John O'Donnell

Express Medicals' business director, JOHN O'DONNELL, considers various models for providing healthcare

As the business director of Express Medicals Ltd for the previous 15+ years, I feel that it is an opportune time to make some observations in respect of how occupational health may be provided by considering a number of delivery models.

Model One – Homographic Model

An interesting model can be seen during the period of the Second World War. The then Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, who was then in his 60s, had an extremely demanding role. For example, he had enormous travel demands placed upon him, including diplomatic trips to Washington, Moscow, Cairo and Yalta. Such trips were made on Royal Navy ships or RAF converted bombers and these journeys were very demanding in terms of time, personal energy and potential danger at a time of great challenge within Britain. Churchill was always accompanied by his personal physician, Lord Moran, who attended the Prime Minister's many medical needs both at home and abroad. This could be viewed as the ultimate delivery model in which there is one-to-one attention with immediate referral to appropriate supporting professionals and all the advantages that come from such close attention. Such a delivery model is ideal for specific individuals such as heads of state.

Model Two – Sports Model

Another model has evolved in the context of modern sports such as football and rugby. This model is characterised by a team of medical professionals working under the leadership of a senior person, often a senior physician, to support individual sportsmen / women and their teams. For example, a Premiership football club will have an in-house sports doctor who will deal with the club's medical requirements, including the facilitation of an array of appropriate investigations (e.g. scans of injured joints) and treatments (e.g. rehabilitative physiotherapy).

Model Three – Industrial Model

A third model was seen in large manufacturing

companies, employing thousands of workers on large company sites, during the twentieth century. This model was characterised by the provision of a dedicated on-site medical centre which was staffed by company doctors and nurses. The core services included pre-employment questionnaires & medical examinations, the treatment of workplace injuries and the holding of occupational medical records.

Model Four – The Static Model

A fourth model is a direct descendant of the previous one. This variant on model three relates to very large construction sites. Readers can learn about such an example by consulting the following publication issued by the ODA (Olympic Delivery Authority), 'Be safe Be healthy' (2010) [www.london2012.com/documents/oda-publications/h-s-park-health-annual-report-2010-final-web.pdf]. Once again, the key component of this delivery model is the provision of a dedicated medical centre (on-site as opposed to in-house) with dedicated medical and complementary staff.

The ODA tells us, in the above-mentioned report, that more than 10,000 pre-employment health checks and nearly 3000 full medicals were carried out. The report also informs us of the progressive approach taken to the deliverance of wellbeing services to the workforce. Working in partnership with the Department of Sexual Health from Homerton Hospital, the Hackney Diabetes Centre and the Men's Health Forum, the medical team were able to deliver an array of health initiatives to the workforce. Projects included campaigns to promote education and behavioural change in respect of such things as diet, smoking, exercise, blood pressure and sexual health. In the circumstance of a single and very large construction site (upon which thousands of workers are employed) this is clearly a model that has much to commend it. However, it is limited by virtue of the fact that the on-site medical centre is closed at the conclusion of the project, leaving no occupational health 'legacy'.

The ABC Model – Adaptable, Bespoke and Commercial

A fifth model is that developed by our own company, Express Medicals Ltd, over the past 15 years in response to our clients' requests which has enabled us to deliver some 90,000 medical examinations over the previous five years. The core components of our model have been designed to meet the needs of construction and transportation companies with locations across Great Britain.

Whilst some client companies have large sites, we have been very mindful that large numbers of companies have workers scattered on sites of varying size, some being quite small, throughout the country. This model optimises service to client companies by offering the flexibility to attend multiple sites of varying size from huge to tiny, in multiple locations and at very short notice.

We deliver our services from three sources. We have two fixed medical centres in London and Stoke. We have mobile staff who can visit any site at home or abroad and we have sessional clinics across the country. This gives us the flexibility to solve client needs in different ways at a value-for-money cost. The model enables the delivery of a wide range of services, including the provision of 'traditional' occupational health services (e.g. surveillance, fit-for-task medicals and referral to a diverse array of medical consultants and other specialists) and innovative wellbeing services.

Model five commends itself in various ways. Firstly, the model does include an occupational health 'legacy' where an on-site medical centre has been used as part of the delivery vehicle. Administratively, any on-site medical centre functions as part of our total facility, with all the long-term advantages that this brings. For example, records will be stored within the database of all our records and medical facilities will still be available for workers requiring services after an on-site project ceases. ■

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