



Public Health  
England

# Educating Occupational Health Nurses

An approach to align education with a service vision for occupational health nurses

V1.0/ November 2016



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Public Health England  
Wellington House  
133-155 Waterloo Road  
London SE1 8UG  
Tel: 020 7654 8000  
[www.gov.uk/phe](http://www.gov.uk/phe)  
Twitter: @PHE\_uk  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland](http://www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland)

Prepared by: Occupational Health Nursing Working Group, sponsored by Public Health England. Document to be reviewed November 2018

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Published November 2016

PHE publications gateway number: 2016431



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## Background

This document has been sponsored by Public Health England (PHE) in conjunction with partners including; Health Education England, higher education institutions (HEIs), lecturers, the Royal College of Nursing, the Association of Occupational Health Nurse Practitioners UK (AOHNP), the National School of Occupational Health, the Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing Development Group (FOHN) and occupational health nurse (OHN) practitioners (see list of contributors on page 20).

The Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN) Occupational Health (OH) register was introduced in 2004. Since then the nature of work has changed and there has been a rise in lifestyle related chronic ill health, organisations employ a multi-generational workforce and there is now a greater emphasis on health and wellness. Especially the impact of physical and mental health on performance, capability, engagement and productivity in addition to sickness absence and accidents at work. In future, the boundaries of traditional OH practice may also extend beyond the workplace to those who are economically inactive. However, there is also a shortage of dedicated qualified OH practitioners to undertake this work.

OH nursing finds itself at a time of change, therefore it was timely to review priorities for educational programmes to consolidate and develop a new approach going forward. OHNs recognise that their educational programmes must continually evolve and adapt in order to meet new workplace challenges as well as to continue the valuable work of the profession.

Currently OHNs in the United Kingdom (UK) are educated through different routes and programmes at HEIs and universities. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) sets standards of proficiency for Specialist Community Public Health Nurses (SCPHNs) and regulates practice. The Code of Practice ('the Code') underpins nursing practice and is central to both the delivery of excellent and auditable practice and effective public protection.

The OH Nursing Working Group (OHNWG) was established to define how to develop and enhance present day education programmes, refocusing on the depth and breadth of curriculum topics, informing the taught elements of courses and supporting the translation of theory into practice (during placements and after employment). The group also developed publicity materials aimed at raising the profile of OH nursing generally amongst adult nursing colleagues.

This document sets out the recommended approach for nurse education going forward. It incorporates 'general prompts' for HEIs and lecturers in assessing and refreshing OH nursing educational programmes. It also lists the requisite 'theory, knowledge and

skills' that must be included into education programmes to ensure excellent, high quality OH services (and to manage any increase in education capacity).

Fitness for practice will be ensured through the NMC standards and validation of education programmes. Lastly, this document is also intended to provide a framework of topics to support practitioners to fulfil the needs of purchasers of services - it does not affect the absolute requirements of the regulatory body.

The content of the curriculum for SCPHN, OH programmes should be that which will enable the achievement of the standards of proficiency sufficient for safe and effective practice.

## Prompts for higher education institutions and lecturers in assessing and refreshing OHN education programmes

It is recommended that education commissioners, HEIs and lecturers consider these prompts from a strategic perspective when reviewing their programmes and take the appropriate action to ensure that courses incorporate the essential elements for graduates to deliver excellent and appropriate services in line with current and future provision.

How well do your current programmes of education for OHNs map to meet the requirements of this document, and current/future service delivery? Do any gaps exist that need to be addressed?

If necessary, how could the educational content of your programmes be adapted to have a greater focus on the key requirements for OHNs, eg the effects of work on health, the effects of health on work; leadership, management and business skills (people, time and resources)?

Do your current programmes offer sufficient flexibility to meet the demands of the workplaces of the future and, if not, what should be considered further?

Do your current programmes allow for multi-professional education from practitioners employed in workplace health and wellbeing now and in the future?

How will you ensure that students recognise the need for lifelong learning and additional knowledge and skills in differing practice settings?

How could you work more closely with senior OH nurse practitioners and stakeholders in OH to identify and increase the range and number of high quality clinical placements and alternative practice opportunities that exist?

How much course input is currently provided by a course teacher who is trained and qualified in OH? Is this sufficient for the needs of your OH students? If not, what actions are required to rectify this situation?

How do you/will you prepare and support course teachers and practice teachers for the ongoing and meaningful support of OHN students?

How will you ensure students are familiar with organisational requirements and models of practice?

# Essential components for inclusion on OH nursing course curricula

Gaining knowledge of public health is an essential part of an OHN's role. Therefore, it is essential to consider key elements of education relevant to this function and the impact of this work on the delivery of good occupational health practice. The principles of public health include:

- stakeholder engagement
- health and safety management
- behavioural change strategies
- health intervention strategies
- mental health and wellbeing
- common health condition management\*\*
- knowledge of relevant specialist advice and support services and the ability to signpost appropriately

\*\* In OH this would be more likely to relate to the impact of long term conditions on health and work rather than the detailed management of common health conditions themselves.

OHNs identify and lead development of resources to meet the needs of working adults, liaising with other professionals and agencies to agree a range of contributions, interventions and opportunities for their clients. They must possess the capacity to use and adapt evidence based intervention strategies to assist clients and organisations to manage health problems and difficulties as they arise.

Four principles underpin the OH nursing approach to their working practice:

- the search for health needs
- the stimulation of awareness of health needs
- the influence on policies affecting health
- the facilitation of an awareness of health needs

The framework outlined in this document lists the essential components relating to theory, knowledge and skills that education commissioners, HEIs and lecturers need to include in all OHN training programmes to maintain fitness for purpose and reflect the requirements for excellent OH nursing practice.

A variety of educational pathways exist that are relevant to OHN practice, therefore it is recognised that the depth to which each item is covered will depend on the level of academic achievement eg diploma, undergraduate or postgraduate level of study. Many of the items described will already be covered within current education programmes and clinical practice. However, they are not currently included in every HEI/university

course. Therefore this guidance has been written to support programme development and change in this respect.

For SCPHN, OH courses (at undergraduate level) OHN student's theoretical classroom-based learning will also be reinforced by a mandatory period of field based practice, ie learning takes place in shared classes with other SCPHNs or allied professionals; specific classes for OHNs; but also in practice (amounting to 50:50% classroom and practice experience). Regarding the latter, it is acknowledged that the practical skills acquired during practice placements will also (to some extent) depend on the particular nature of the placement and the role involved. At the end of all placements there is a requirement for practice teacher sign off.

All OH nursing programmes should be delivered within the context of leadership and evidence based practice. They should also closely relate to the current national Public Health Outcomes Framework as well as contemporary OH practice itself, ie taking into account the lifecourse of an employee from aged 16 years old to their (extended) retirement through prevention and early intervention. Each of the core elements listed below links OH nursing practice with the standards of proficiency for SCPHN, OH. The standards support OHNs in preventing ill health, promoting and protecting the health and wellbeing of working adults as well as improving individual and organisational outcomes.

## Public health

Public health		Theory and Knowledge	Skills	
	Theory, Concepts and Drivers	Theories of the concepts of health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to deliver OH nursing practice within a public health framework whilst concurrently taking into account the objectives related to employee health and wellbeing, work performance and productivity within the OHN's employing organisation</li> <li>Ability to describe the national drivers, public health and economic agenda in relation to work, health and wellbeing and to use the information to drive and influence practice</li> </ul>	
		The drivers of work, health and wellbeing including the national economic agenda in relation to employment and worklessness		
		Relationship between worklessness and public health social model of disability in relation to health as a barrier to employment		
		Public Health Outcomes Framework		
		The determinants of health		
		Health inequalities		
		Understanding whole system approaches to workforce health		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand relationships between environment/behaviour/culture etc</li> </ul>
		The changing nature of work - globalisation, information technology, work-life integration		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to advise organisations on the potential effects of the changing nature of work and the ageing population on employment, workability, work performance and productivity</li> <li>Ability to advise organisations on the prevalence of occupational disease and injury</li> </ul>
	The changing nature of employee demographics – the ageing population and the effect on employment and work capability			
OH Nursing	The role of OH nursing in relation to the public health framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to describe the wider role of OH in the context of the public health agenda and the Public Health Outcomes Framework</li> </ul>		
	Public health in the context of work, health and wellbeing			
	Worklessness and its relationship to OH nursing			
Health Risk Assessment	Models of health risk assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to use an appropriate health risk assessment model to carry out a departmental or whole organisation physical and mental health risk assessment and present the findings</li> </ul>		
	Organisational health risk assessment			
Health Promotion	The workplace as a setting for health promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to influence and lead a health promotion project related to public health outcomes, making it relevant to organisational objectives of work performance, productivity and profit</li> <li>Ability to engage staff at all levels to undertake health promotion to support employees to reach and maintain optimal health (and prevent ill health/protect health)</li> </ul>		

P 3		Theory and Knowledge	Skills
		Health promotion models and frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to critically assess health promotion models in deciding which model to use for which health promotion purpose</li> <li>• Understand and can facilitate ways in which employees can be empowered to take better control of their health and wellness</li> </ul>
		Social marketing as a health promotion tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to use social marketing as a tool for health promotion in the workplace</li> </ul>
		Environmental impact on health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to advise organisations on the impact of the working environment on health and wellbeing and identify situations where the environment adversely affects health and wellbeing</li> </ul>

## Effect of work on health and wellbeing

<b>Effect of work on health and wellbeing</b>		<b>Theory and Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>
	Occupational Illness and Disease	The reciprocal effects of work on physical and psychological health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to describe the ways in which work affects physical and psychological health. Understanding issues impacting on mental health and wellbeing</li> <li>• Can articulate the health benefits of work</li> </ul>
		The prevalence and types of occupational disease, work related ill health and injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to describe the prevalence and commercial implications to organisations of occupational disease, ill health and injury (and how to prevent these)</li> </ul>
		Working knowledge of toxicology in relation to employee health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to advise employers and managers on the potential health effects of common chemical, physical and biological agents</li> <li>• Ability to advise employers on the prevention of health effects due to chemical, physical and biological agents</li> <li>• Ability to identify potential toxicological effects, assess risk and refer for medical assistance or to allied health or health and safety professionals as appropriate</li> </ul>
		Working knowledge of occupational hygiene methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to advise employers and managers on the health and safety and occupational hygiene methods required to identify potential hazards to health</li> <li>• Ability to identify potential health hazards, assess risk and refer for medical assistance or to allied health or health and safety professionals as appropriate</li> </ul>
		Working knowledge of ergonomics in relation to employee health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to advise employers, managers and employees on the design of work tasks to prevent occupationally related injury such as repetitive strain injuries or musculoskeletal disorders</li> <li>• Ability to identify potential health hazards, assess risk and refer for medical assistance or to allied health or health and safety professionals as appropriate</li> </ul>
		Workplace health hazards – ergonomic, physical, chemical, biological, psychosocial and mechanical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to advise employers, managers and employees on a wide range of health hazards</li> <li>• Ability to identify potential health hazards, assess risk and refer for medical assistance or to allied health or health and safety professionals as appropriate</li> </ul>

		<p>The health effects of work-related stress and common mental health issues such as stress, anxiety and depression</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to advise employers, managers and individual employees on the mental, emotional and physical effects of work-related stress</li> <li>• Ability to advise employers and managers on the employers' duties in relation to the prevention of work-related stress</li> <li>• Ability to carry out risk assessment in relation to work-related stress</li> <li>• Ability to refer employers and managers to tools for preventing and managing work-related stress</li> <li>• Ability to carry out individual health risk assessment where work-related stress is thought to be a factor in employee ill health</li> <li>• OH influence on a positive work culture</li> </ul>
<p><b>Effect of work on health and wellbeing</b></p>	<p>Health Surveillance, Assessment, Monitoring and Management</p>	<p>Health surveillance – methods, legal requirements, ethical and commercial implications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to advise employers and managers on the legal requirements for health surveillance and the method of health surveillance required for work tasks where a risk and/or a legal requirement has been identified</li> <li>• Ability to carry out risk assessment, identify when health surveillance is required and what method of health surveillance should be used</li> <li>• Ability to recognise what specific health surveillance training is required and access the training as appropriate for their specific job role</li> <li>• Ability to advise employers about suitability for role and fitness for work following health surveillance assessments</li> </ul>
		<p>Working knowledge of health impact assessment methods – potential impact of workplace on the population (control of emissions to air, water and land quality, healthcare services and resources, psychosocial environment)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to advise employers on the need for health impact assessment, the legislation related to environmental safety and to refer to environmental health or other allied specialists where appropriate</li> </ul>
		<p>Occupational illness monitoring, health surveillance and management (occupational asthma, noise induced hearing loss, effects of vibration, occupational dermatitis, workplace stressors etc)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to collect and present data related to work related injury and ill health</li> <li>• Ability to advise employers and managers on the prevention and management of work related injury and ill health</li> <li>• Ability to manage infections such as diarrhoea and vomiting</li> </ul>

## Effect of health and wellbeing on work

Effect of health and wellbeing on work		Theory and Knowledge	Skills
	Bio- psychosocial principles	The bio-psycho-social model of health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the bio-psycho-social pathways to health</li> <li>• Ability to carry out case management using a bio-psycho-social model</li> <li>• Ability to influence, affect and facilitate individual health behaviour change</li> <li>• Can challenge individual barriers to behaviour change</li> <li>• Understands principles of individual behaviour change and can identify/challenge commonly held myths and unhelpful beliefs in addition to negative behaviours eg through the use of tools and techniques such as solution focussed therapy, motivational interviewing, and cognitive behavioural therapy</li> <li>• Can plan and deliver health promotion sessions on a range of topics eg Know Your Numbers</li> </ul>
		The employee in the context of family and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to relate to the employee as a member of a wider community of inter-social relationships</li> <li>• Understanding of the unique interaction with clients in the workplace setting including:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Socio-economic pressures that influence decisions to work, or not, that impact on health. Can articulate consequences such as loss of employment</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	Health Conditions	The incidence of long term conditions impacting on health and work performance and their management at work – hypertension, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, musculo-skeletal disorders, anxiety and depression and TB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to advise employers and managers on work capability</li> <li>• Ability to gather data and carry out health promotion related to the Public Health Outcomes Framework – for example in relation to the prevention of obesity and cardiovascular disease</li> </ul>
	Individual Assessment	Methods of individual physical and psychological health assessment and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to carry out a functional assessment of physical and mental wellbeing and, from the findings, assess work capability etc</li> </ul>

		Methods of fitness for work health assessment using specific workplace standards where they exist (eg back pain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to identify and support people with mental health issues and advise on reasonable adjustments for people with a learning disability. Knowing where to access additional advice</li> </ul>
	Management	The employment of those with long term health conditions and/or disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to advise employees and the employer on the health management, return to work programmes and safe and healthy methods and patterns of working for those with long term health conditions</li> </ul>

### Research and evidence based practice

<b>Research and evidence based practice</b>	<b>Theory and Knowledge</b>		<b>Skills</b>	
		Critical thinking and appraisal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to identify relevant research, types of study (quantitative and qualitative), their uses, and sources of best practice, carry out critical appraisal, basic statistical analysis and provide a rationale for application in occupational health nursing practice, utilising research and clinical audit as a lever to service improvement/change</li> </ul>	
		Research methodology		
		Epidemiology		
		Integrating research into practice		
	Comprehensive understanding of risk		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can understand risk and articulate that in specific contexts</li> </ul>	

## Leadership and management

<b>Leadership and management</b>		<b>Theory and Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>
	Organisations and Roles	The structure and function of organisations in the UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to relate theory to context of own organisation</li> </ul>
		The structure, function and role of trades unions	
		Corporate social responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to influence, affect and facilitate organisational corporate social responsibility in relation to the improvement of health and wellbeing in the neighbourhood communities which the organisation sustains</li> </ul>
		The role of allied health professionals, health and safety, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, occupational hygienist, human resources etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to identify which allied health professional or management professional to refer to if required</li> </ul>
	Leadership and Management Systems and Styles	Models of management systems, leadership and management styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to describe management systems and management styles.</li> <li>Ability to identify own preferred management style and its potential effect on colleagues</li> </ul>
	Health and Safety	Workplace health and safety and associated legislation; and approved codes of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to advise employers, managers and employees on relevant legislation and approved codes of practice</li> </ul>
		Health and safety management including risk analysis and assessment methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to advise employers, managers and employees on risk assessment methods</li> <li>Ability to carry out risk assessment</li> </ul>
	Other Legislation	Employment and specific workplace setting legislation (Equality Act, Data Protection Act, Access to Medical Reports Act, Working Time Regulations, Employment Rights Act, Human Medicines Regulations 2012 etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to advise employers, managers and employees on relevant legislation</li> <li>Ability to carry out safe and confidential professional practice in relation to data protection, anti-discrimination, access to medical reports and safeguarding vulnerable adults</li> </ul>
	Organisational Health and Wellbeing	Influencing and developing organisational policies and strategies for health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to apply theory to influence organisational policy and strategy for health and wellbeing</li> <li>Ability to lead and manage projects to improve the organisational approach to employee health and wellbeing</li> </ul>
Promoting the health of individuals, teams and workforces		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to use public health data and organisational data to influence, lead and manage projects to improve employee health and wellbeing</li> </ul>	

L e a		Theory and Knowledge	Skills
		Attendance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to advise employers and managers on the methods and rationale for sickness absence management</li> <li>• Ability to use a bio-psychosocial model of case management</li> <li>• Ability to carry out return to work interviews and advise on safe return to work programmes</li> <li>• Ability to advise about reasonable workplace adjustments</li> <li>• Ability to write relevant and confidential management reports</li> <li>• Have a comprehensive understanding of:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ records management</li> <li>○ consent</li> <li>○ confidentiality</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
		The 'Psychological Contract'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to recognise the effect of the Psychological Contract on employee health and wellbeing</li> </ul>
Leading Service Improvement		Planning, delivering and evaluating services ethically and effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to undertake OH service needs assessment, programme review</li> <li>• Understands the principles of audit in OH and can undertake a basic service audit</li> <li>• Ability to write and present a business plan</li> <li>• Ability to undertake effective business related project management and planning</li> </ul>
		Staff and stakeholder engagement, partnership working, professional interdisciplinary working, and leading outside the sphere of influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to identify, network, engage and collaborate with staff and stakeholders and work with partners and other professionals to achieve effective working relationships and co-production</li> </ul>
		Methods of influencing and negotiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to influence organisational and individual health and wellbeing and negotiate required outcomes</li> </ul>
		Principles of operational effectiveness – budget management, people management, performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to apply knowledge to practice</li> </ul>
		Quality assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to identify examples of good practice and benchmark organisational and own professional practice</li> <li>• Ability to advise on requirements of Safe, Effective, Quality Occupational Health Services (SEQOHS) Standards</li> </ul>

<b>L e a</b>		<b>Theory and Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>
	Equality and Diversity	Cultural understanding – diversity and inclusivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to apply knowledge to ensure a fair, just and equal professional practice</li> <li>• Ability to advise employers, managers and employees</li> <li>• Understand stigma associated with mental illness and ways to reduce it</li> </ul>
	Emergency Planning	Emergency planning and management – emergency first aid, disaster planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to advise organisations on emergency procedures, and, in particular, first aid provision</li> </ul>
	Organisational Change	Models of organisational change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to influence, affect and facilitate organisational change in relation to the approach to employee health and wellbeing</li> </ul>
		Effect of organisational change on health and wellbeing	

Professional practice

<b>Professional practice</b>	<b>Theory and Knowledge</b>	<b>Skills</b>
	Case management (face to face and telephone based)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to carry out a bio-psychosocial model of case management including: – referrals procedures, consent and history taking and recording, additional specialist advice and onward referral, functional capacity, report writing, effective return to work planning, effective use of case conferences, multi-disciplinary working, giving written and verbal feedback – especially for complex and difficult cases, having difficult conversations eg challenging health behaviours, suitability for role, and provision of fitness for work advice, line manager coaching, using appropriate tools, caseload management, follow up and closure</li> <li>• Demonstrates a working knowledge of employment and disability related law</li> <li>• Recognises the impact of acute/chronic ill health and disability on work attendance/performance and supports those with long term conditions to remain economically active</li> <li>• Ability to use tools to assess anxiety and depression eg Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS)</li> </ul>

## Educating Occupational Health Nurses

	Safeguarding vulnerable adults/groups and working knowledge of safeguarding for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to embed principles and requirements of safeguarding into practice</li> </ul>
	Confidentiality and data protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to ensure client confidentiality and data protection in practice</li> </ul>
	Group facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is able to direct meetings at own level with own professional team and with multi-disciplinary teams</li> <li>• Ability to facilitate group and engage employees in participatory approaches</li> </ul>
	Presentation skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is able to carry out presentations clearly and confidently</li> </ul>
	Organisational and individual health data reporting and management of results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is able to gather organisational health and wellbeing data, assess trends, and report on results</li> <li>• Is able to write health reports and make recommendations</li> </ul>
	Lifelong learning – maintaining professional accountability, self-directed learning, CPD, training and development, on the job learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can identify importance of life-long learning and able to develop goals and ambitions</li> <li>• Able to identify the requirements to meet NMC revalidation standards</li> </ul>
	Supply of medicines (including Immunisation & Vaccination)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand unique arrangements for supply of prescription only medicines that relate to occupational health nurses (as describes in The Human Medicines Regulations 2012)</li> <li>• Competent to deliver immunisation programmes as required by role and as governed by the legislative framework and DH guidance</li> </ul>

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## Contributors

Thanks to the following for their contribution to this document:

Jo Berriman: Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing Development Group

Lynda Bruce: Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen

Christina Butterworth: National School of Occupational Health

Denise Carroll: Public Health England

Karen Coomer: Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing Development Group

Trudy Gregory: University of Derby

Elaine Harris: University of the West of England

Anne Harriss: London South Bank University

Helen Kirk: Public Health England and RCN Public Health Steering Group

Suzanne Le Blond: University of Derby

Joy Murray: University of the West of England

Diane Romano-Woodward: Association of Occupational Health Nurse Practitioners (UK)

Marisa Stephenson: University of the West of Scotland

Pauline Watts OBE: Public Health England (lead author)