Defining ‘safety critical work’ for the purpose of identifying, classifying and assessing fitness for work in ‘safety critical workers’

Dr Jennifer Dodman, 2013

ABSTRACT

Introduction: To date there is no accepted generic definition for ‘safety critical work’, or ‘safety critical workers’. ‘Safety critical workers’ may pose a risk to safety if they have an impairment or medical condition. Therefore, there is a need to identify such workers in order to assess their individual risk.

Aim: To define ‘safety critical work’.

Objectives: To use this definition to identify and classify ‘safety critical workers’.

Methods: The Delphi technique was used to ask expert panels of Occupational Physicians and Safety Professionals about their knowledge and opinions of ‘safety critical work’ and how workers in such roles are assessed for fitness. This was done using a series of qualitative questionnaires in order to achieve consensus of opinion about a definition for ‘safety critical work’. The NVivo 9 software package was used for data analysis.

Results: ‘Safety critical work’ involves any activity, process or work related factor that can put the worker, other workers, the general public, the environment or property at risk of significant harm if it is not carried out correctly. This can be used to identify ‘safety critical workers’ and classify them based on individual assessment of fitness for work.

Conclusion: Assessment of workers undertaking ‘safety critical work’ is a complex process. It is first necessary to identify ‘safety critical work’, followed by the workers undertaking it. Such workers should undergo a fitness assessment according to their individual risks relative to the job they are undertaking, which can be undertaken on an on-going basis according to an established framework, which incorporates the individual aspects of the worker, the job and the industry.

Key words: safety critical work, safety critical worker, fitness to work, safety critical.