What information do occupational physicians use in assessing an employee with common mental health problems?

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**ABSTRACT**

**Objectives:** To determine what occupational physicians believe are the objectives in a consultation of an employee with a mental health problem. To relate those objectives to the range of clinical enquiry and the use of mental ill-health rating tools.

**Design:** A web-based questionnaire study of the members of the Society of Occupational Medicine.

**Results:** The response rate was 26.5%. The majority of the respondents were in full-time Occupational Medical practice (64.7%), working out-with the NHS (75.2%) and having a specialist qualification (60.8%).

Information about work-related factors was most commonly regarded as an objective of the consultation. Responses suggest some use for clinical rating tools in respect of diagnosis and progress but not generally in work-related outcomes.

There was a statistically significant correlation between condition-related objectives for a consultation and use of clinical tools to assess condition ($p=0.012$) but not between work-related objectives and use of those same tools to assess work-related factors ($p=0.39$).

**Conclusion:** Clinical assessment tools such as the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale do have some utility in terms of assessing an employee with a possible mental health problem in terms of their condition. However such a utility in terms of assessment of key work-related outcomes is not shown by these results. Further work to consider the value of more occupationally orientated tools may help inform practice.