

What do you think are the positive and negative impacts of Welsh Government's remote working proposals on Health (physical and mental) and wellbeing?

- SOM welcomes a focus on health and wellbeing in remote working.
- We note SOM guidance we produced on home working and DSE during Covid.
- We welcome the Welsh Government's aspirations for those who work at home for work and health interventions.
- A strong positive message about the beneficial impact of home work should be promulgated, to the public and employers.
- Action is needed to deliver consistent physical and mental advice for all home workers - with access to Occupational Health expertise. Our suggested model would see:
 1. Tier one: non-complex cases: Facilitate consistent advice about the benefits of good health and practice in home working and help for return to work after illness
 2. Tier two: complex cases: direct referral to OH by GPs, other clinicians, and work coaches. This should be accessible irrespective of employment status. Could use existing NHS OH, alternatively, this could be commissioned locally from within the private sector.
- The impartial position of OH between the employer and employee is critical in managing the perceived bias by either party, or by outside agencies that would otherwise be an important barrier to work. OH could also support home workers by providing condition-specific guidance on fitness for work.

How can the benefits of remote working be maximised, and what can be done to mitigate any potential risks and negative impacts?

Benefits will be maximized if there is access to occupational health to these home workers; and we urge the Welsh Government to invest in occupational health (OH) professionals to allow this scale up to occur. SOM is calling for universal access to OH - see <https://www.som.org.uk/universal-access-occupational-health-oh>. Key asks are ensuring:

- There should be investment in expert OH advice in the Welsh government on home working
- Establishment of national data set about home working
- Investment in a research Centre for Health and Work to translate evidence about home working into policy
- Access to OH for home working for home workers
- A National Clinical Director for Work and Health to lead this work

How should the Welsh Government work in partnership with the public sector, private sector and voluntary sector to deliver its remote working proposals?

- Individuals who work at home need access to conversations with trusted health professionals who understand their medical needs, which may be complex, and can refer to a range of support services; medical and non-medical.
- Home workers need direct, individualised, and concise advice on how to support their health conditions in their home. OH professionals are ideally placed to 'join-up' service access and advice between individuals, their health care professionals, and their employers.

Are there any specific examples of evidence and research internationally that the Committee should be aware of?

- Occupational health (OH) is uniquely placed amongst medical specialties to enhance the productivity of the nation whilst keeping workers healthy and safe. We note the strong evidence base for occupational health in return to work. [Occupational health: the value proposition](#); [Occupational Health: The Global Evidence and Value](#); [The Value of Occupational Health Research](#), and [The Value of Occupational Health to Workplace Wellbeing](#).
- SOM have produced guidance leaflets for company [directors and commissioners of services](#), [line managers and HR professionals](#), and [workers and their representatives](#).

About The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) - a multi-disciplinary professional society whose membership includes over 1,700 OH doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and technicians. SOM Patrons are Lord Blunkett, Dame Carol Black, and Sir Norman Lamb. www.som.org.uk.

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SOM

Supporting occupational health and wellbeing professionals