

When would you use an occupational physician?

Occupational physicians are medical consultants who specialise in evaluating and managing the complex interrelationships between work and health.

After completion of basic medical training, trainee occupational physicians must undertake at least a further five years academic and experiential training, as well as passing an examination before gaining specialist recognition. The specialist qualification required in Australia is the Fellowship of the Australasian Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FAFOM), a division of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP).

When would you use occupational physicians as opposed to orthopaedic surgeons?

- Most soft tissue musculo-skeletal injuries that do not involve surgery (especially soft tissue injuries).
- Evaluation of occupational cause(s) of musculo-skeletal injuries.
- Assessment of impairment, disability and handicap after musculo-skeletal injuries.
- Fitness for work resumption (including alternative duties) after musculo-skeletal injuries.
- Worksite assessments to implement work resumption programs after musculo-skeletal injuries.

When would you use occupational physicians as opposed to general physicians?

- When diseases/illnesses are considered to be occupationally related (e.g. occupational asthma, exposure to toxic chemicals, fumes or related substances).
- Advice on management, vocational rehabilitation and return to work programs.
- Advice on injury/disease information regarding future employment.
- Provision of advices on occupational health and safety information (e.g. chemical safety, ergonomic or hygiene assessments).

Do occupational physicians only assess workplace-related injuries and illnesses?

No, occupational physicians provide evaluations on a much broader variety of issues, including:

- Assessment of impairment, disability and handicap from almost any cause.
- Fitness of injured/ill individuals for specific work tasks or return-to-work proposals.
- Interpretation of the medico-legal aspects of occupational health and safety issues.
- Vocational rehabilitation and work resumption programs.
- Evaluation and implementation of workplace prevention strategies, including health surveillance for at risk employees.