

## OBTAINING OCCUPATIONAL HISTORIES

Work-related diseases and injuries do not always have a clear cause and effect. When workers seek medical attention for a health problem, it is good practice that they are asked about their working conditions. Some workers' clinics will take a full occupational history of their patients. Unfortunately, most medical clinics and physicians do not.

An occupational history should include:

- the various jobs held by a worker throughout his or her working life
- the dates and the duration of the jobs
- any known or suspected hazards, descriptions of their intensity and duration of exposures
- any abnormal exposures, for example, a maintenance worker exposed to a "one-off" event when the controls fail and a contaminant is emitted in larger than normal quantities
- work-induced stress and psycho-social disorders caused or made worse by work-related factors including insecurity such as involuntary job loss, income insecurity, lack of training for jobs performed and so on
- descriptions of work processes
- types of raw materials used and products produced
- periods of ill health and whether there was access to medical care
- whether co-workers complained of similar health problems

Any available material safety data sheets or industrial hygiene reports can supplement this information.

It may be difficult for workers to convince medical practitioners to consider their work histories. To save time and make the task easier for the health care provider, workers can prepare their own histories in advance and present them to their physicians to consider. The history should be kept on file. The following self-administered occupational history form can be used.

Date	Employer Name: product or service provided	Job title and specific duties	Major exposures (such as dusts, chemical, noise, repetitive motion, stress)	Protective equipment (such as respirator, ear plugs, gloves)

Adapted from Barefoot Research