

INTERNATIONAL CODE OF ETHICS FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS: GUIDE FOR PHYSICIANS OF ITALIAN WORKERS' COMPENSATION AUTHORITY

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Faculty Disclosure

Nothing to disclose

BRIEF HISTORY

- **The modern ethical codes begin to appear on the latter half of the 20th century**
- **1976 : American Occupational Medicine Association (AOMA) code**
- **It was revised by the American College of Occupational and Environmental Health (ACOEH) in 1984**
- **Codes of the Royal College in the United Kingdom (UK) were first published in 1980 and regularly revised over the next two decades**
- **The International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) Code of Ethics was published in 1992, and revised in 2002.**

BRIEF HISTORY

- **A reprinted edition has been made in conjunction with the ICOH 2012 Congress in the view of the release of the new edition which is under development.**
- **During the triennium 2009-2011 the review of the International Code of Ethics has been conducted involving many ICOH members**
- **Review is aimed at enhancing the ethical awareness and updating the Code with adding supplementary provisions reflecting recent developments. The review activities by the Code Review Group were presented in Milan in early 2011**

INTERNATIONAL CODE OF ETHICS FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS (OHP)

- **The Code is composed by a “Preface” in which is explained why the Occupational Health Professionals need a specific Code different from other Codes built up for general practitioners or other specializations, followed by**
- **An “Introduction” where the targets of Occupational Health are underlined and which professionals contribute to achieve the defined target.**
- **The third part of the Code presents the duties and the obligations of occupational health professionals and in this part we have to stress the principles useful for INAIL’s health professionals.**

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF ETHICS

- **Integrity** – to be straightforward and honest in all professional relationships.
- **Objectivity** – to not allow bias, conflict of interest or undue influence of others to override professional judgments.
- **Professional Competence and Due Care** – to maintain professional knowledge and skill at the level required to ensure that a patient receives competent professional services based on current developments in practice, legislation and techniques and act diligently and in accordance with applicable technical and professional standards.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF ETHICS

- **Confidentiality** – to respect the confidentiality of information acquired as a result of professional relationships and, therefore, not disclose any such information to third parties without proper and specific authorization, unless there is a legal or professional right or duty to disclose, nor use the information for the personal advantage
- **Professional Behavior** – to comply with relevant laws and regulations and avoid any action that discredits the profession

Why an International Code of Ethics for OHP as distinct from codes of ethics for all medical practitioners ?

- **The increased recognition of the complex and sometimes competing responsibilities of occupational health and safety professionals towards the workers, the employers, public health and labour authorities and other bodies such as social security and judicial authorities.**
- **The increasing number of occupational health and safety professionals as resulting from the compulsory or voluntary establishment of occupational health services.**
- **The emerging development of a multidisciplinary approach in occupational health which implies an involvement in occupational health services of specialists who belong to various professions.**

Why should we be concerned about ethics in occupational medicine practice?

- **The primary motivation for addressing ethics in occupational health must be to improve the quality of professional practice, in the form of better care for patients, and better services to industry. In doing so, the occupational health professional can hopefully find ways to ensure compliance with legal, professional, and ethical standards simultaneously.**
- **The aim of occupational medicine is to protect workers' health and to promote the adaptation of work to the capabilities of workers taking into account their state of health.**

Ethics in occupational health is by essence a field of interactions between many partners

- **The expression occupational health professionals includes all those who provide occupational health services within the framework of a multidisciplinary team approach.**
- **So this code aims to be relevant for a wider group of individuals, i.e. all those who work in the field of occupational medicine and not only for the physicians**
- **Doctors , employers, social partners and workers have to deal with objectives which may be competing such as the protection of employment and the protection of health.**
- **It's clear the central role played by INAIL involving the physicians in their key position among employers, workers and workers' organization.**

Duties and obligations of occupational health professionals

- **The primary aim of occupational health practice is to safeguard the health of workers and to promote a safe and healthy working environment. In pursuing this aim, occupational health professionals must use validated methods of risk evaluation, propose efficient preventive measures and follow-up their implementation**
- **Occupational health professionals must continuously strive to be familiar with the work and the working environment as well as to improve their competence and to remain well informed in scientific and technical knowledge, occupational hazards and the most efficient means to eliminate or to reduce the relevant risks**
- **The occupational health professionals must advise the management and the workers on factors within the undertaking which may affect workers' health**

Duties and obligations of occupational health professionals

- **Special consideration should be given to the rapid application of simple preventive measures which are cost-effective, technically sound and easily implemented**
- **Occupational health professionals must contribute to the information of workers on occupational hazards to which they may be exposed in an objective and prudent manner which does not conceal any fact and emphasises the preventive measures**
- **Occupational health professionals must not reveal industrial or commercial secrets of which they may become aware for their activities**
- **The objectives and the details of the health surveillance must be clearly defined and the workers must be informed about them**
- **The results of examinations, carried out within the framework of health surveillance must be explained to the worker concerned**

Duties and obligations of occupational health professionals

- **Biological tests and other investigations must be chosen from the point of view of their validity for protection of the health of the worker concerned, with due regard to their sensitivity, their specificity and their predictive value**
- **Preference must always be given to non-invasive methods and to examinations, which do not involve any danger to the health of the worker concerned**
- **Occupational health professionals may contribute to public health in different ways, in particular by their activities in health education, health promotion and health screening.**
- **Occupational health professionals must be aware of their role in relation to the protection of the community and of the environment**
- **Occupational health professionals must report objectively to the scientific community on new or suspected occupational hazards and relevant preventive methods**

INAIL

INAIL : Italian workers compensation authority is now not just compensation but a global protection system for all workers. Recent innovative provisions of law ranging from prevention, medical treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration in the social and working life put INAIL's physicians in a key role in the management of occupational health practice.

INAIL

INAIL should be considered with its wide range of professionals in different disciplines an high level laboratory of a multidisciplinary team approach in the field of occupational health service.

Our health professionals include occupational health physicians and nurses, factory inspectors, occupational hygienists and occupational psychologists, specialists involved in ergonomics (former ISPESL), in rehabilitation therapy (Budrio, Volterra) , in accident prevention and in the improvement of the working environment as well as in occupational health and safety research. Our purpose is to mobilise the competence of these occupational health professionals within the framework of a multidisciplinary team approach.

INAIL

At the same time we are a «competent public authority» having the power to issue regulations, orders having the force of law.

The INAIL global approach of occupational health care and occupational health promotion through the overall care addresses workers' health and their human and social needs in a comprehensive approach which includes preventive health care, health promotion, curative health care, rehabilitation and compensation where appropriate, as well as strategies for recovery and reintegration into the working environment.

ETHICS AT INAIL

The expression «occupational health professionals» is meant to include all those at INAIL who, in a professional capacity, provide occupational health services or are involved in an occupational health practice.

The trend is to mobilise the competence of these occupational health professionals within the framework of a multidisciplinary team approach and we think that at INAIL a multidisciplinary team approach is a part of the story of our company and a point of strength in a future perspective of tasks' implementation. It is essential to define the role of occupational health physicians and their relationships with other professionals inside and outside INAIL , with the competent authority and with social partners.

ETHICS AT INAIL

This calls for a clear view about the ethics of occupational health professionals and standards in their professional conduct. When specialists of several professions are working together within a multidisciplinary approach, they should endeavour to base their action on shared sets of values and have an understanding of each others' duties, obligations, responsibilities and professional standards.

Our aim at INAIL is to improve the health and the social well-being of workers individually and collectively with integrity in professional conduct, with impartiality, with respect for the protection of confidentiality of health data.

ETHICS AT INAIL

Not only in the last time but from many years INAIL's physicians have to deal with employers , workers, safety professionals, social security , judicial authorities in the framework which requires a full compliance with the fundamental principles of ethic.

INAIL' physicians apply the Code in their work with occupational health professionals and occupational health services regardless of whether they operate in a free market context subject to competition or within the framework of public sector health services.

INAIL acts as an authoritative body for the purpose of consultation in matters of educational or public interest concerning occupational medicine

Biological monitoring and investigations

Very frequently indeed the workers asked INAIL's physicians more details about biological tests and other investigations about their validity and relevance for protection of the health of the worker concerned even if these investigations have been carried out in the framework of health surveillance.

It's our duty to explain to the workers that where a choice is possible and appropriate, preference must always be given to non-invasive methods and to examinations, which do not involve any danger to the health of the worker concerned.

Biological monitoring and investigations

An invasive investigation or an examination which involves a risk to the health of the worker concerned may only be advised after an evaluation of the benefits to the worker and the risks involved. Such an investigation is subject to the worker's informed consent and must be performed according to the highest professional standards.

In our specific job it cannot be justified for insurance purposes or in relation to insurance claims.

Health promotion

When engaging in health education, health promotion, and public health programmes, INAIL's occupational health professionals must seek the participation of both employers and workers in their design and in their implementation.

Competence, integrity and impartiality

Occupational health professionals must always act in the interest of the health and safety of the workers.

Occupational health professionals must base their judgements on scientific knowledge and technical competence and call upon specialised expert advice as necessary.

Professional independence

Occupational health professionals must seek and maintain full professional independence and observe the rules of confidentiality in the execution of their functions. Occupational health professionals must under no circumstances allow their judgement and statements to be influenced by any conflict of interest, in particular when advising the employer, the workers or their representatives

The occupational health professionals must build a relationship of trust, confidence and equity with the people to whom they provide occupational health services : workers or their representatives, employers.

All workers should be treated in an equitable manner, without any form of discrimination as regards their condition, their convictions or the reason which led to the consultation of the occupational health professionals.

Medical confidentiality

For what concerning medical records workers must be given free access to the data relating to their health .

In the respect of medical confidentiality individual medical data and the results of medical investigations must be recorded in confidential medical files which must be kept secured under the responsibility of the occupational health physician and the occupational health nurse. Access to medical files, their transmission and their release are governed by national laws and regulations on medical data where they exist and relevant national codes of ethics for health professionals and medical practitioners.

The information contained in these files must only be used for occupational health purposes.

Medical confidentiality

Information on aggregate health data on groups of workers may be disclosed to management and workers' representatives in the undertaking or to safety and health committees, where they exist, in order to help them in their duties to protect the health and safety of exposed groups of workers.

INAIL's aggregate data on workers are public and represent the basic elements for studies and investigations in the field of occupational injuries and work-related diseases.

These data must be reported to the competent authority according to national laws and regulations

GRAZIE PER
L'ATTENZIONE

