

April Fool not so far-fetched?

Thank you to Joan Lewis and Linda Goldman for revealing the future of OH in 'A political issue' (*Occupational Health*, April 2003).

As the powerful collective of OH nursing organisations begins to flex its lobbying muscle, I allow myself to dream about the outcome.

If I were to ask you to suspend your disbelief and dream with me, with no possibility of failure, tell me this:

- Who will the minister be?
- Can we influence this decision?
- What will a minister for occupational health do for our profession?
- When will the collective reach a critical mass?
- Does the collective know your views?

Yes, I believe a critical mass is needed. Each voice that we can add to the collective brings it more power. I urge you to add yours. Do you share this dream?

If this dream is to become a reality, what action do you (yes you) need to take?



Joan Lewis' and Linda Goldman's article from April's issue

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● **Editor's reply:** In the April issue of OH, we published an April Fool's article by Linda Goldman and Joan Lewis, which described plans to introduce a

new extra-governmental organisation to reorganise internal processes (EGOTRIP), with the formation of a Department for Occupational Health. But maybe this idea is not as far-fetched as it first seemed?

If you've got some thoughts on the matter, do let us know.

Management holds key to absenteeism

Reading the April edition of *Occupational Health*, it is interesting, but not surprising, that three articles are dedicated to the issue of absenteeism and rehabilitation in the workplace.

The absence of an employee for a long period of time naturally puts pressure on an organisation, in terms of the costs of covering absence and also the morale of team workers.

Achieving the smooth return to work of an employee who has been absent for some time, requires early steps to be taken to establish a non-threatening rapport with the individual concerned.

If the emphasis of the managing sickness absence transfers from the GP to the employer, (as correctly outlined in Graham Johnson's article 'Sickness

absence cure'), it is essential that management has the appropriate skills and expertise to deal with this issue.

I have met many managers who see the return-to-work interview as just another procedure that has to be carried out.

Bill, one of my client departmental managers, told me: "It is just something I usually do while walking down the corridor, and I get the employee to sign on the dotted line before I even get to my office."

If management are to be proactively involved in this process, they need a full understanding of the reasons behind the initiative, and training to ensure they have good communication skills, so that discussions between them and their employees take place as an

ongoing process, and not just when they are absent.

Management has the key to absenteeism. OH is essentially in place when needed for its specific expertise, but management are there on the shopfloor to identify and diffuse issues as and when they occur, and before they get out of hand.

The 'Bills' of this world cannot be expected to perform their job effectively, unless they have the tools to do the job.

People are not necessarily born 'good communicators and listeners'. They need training, and organisations need to invest in developing people management skills.

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