THE COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRISTS

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# DOMICILIARY EYE CARE

# LONE WORKING GUIDANCE

Lone working carries a risk that applies to professionals and other staff working alone in care homes, patients' own homes or working alone in fixed premises. Lone working, therefore, is a workplace risk for which both employers and staff share responsibility.

Section 2 from the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) sets out a duty of care on employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees whilst they are at work.
More recently, Regulation 3 from the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) states that every employer shall make a suitable and sufficient assessment of:

- the risks to the health and safety of their employees to which they are exposed whilst they are at work
- the risks to the health and safety of persons not in their employment arising out of or in connection with the conduct by him of his undertaking.

The law therefore requires employers to consider carefully, and then deal with, any health and safety risks for people working alone. Other points to note are:

- Employers also have responsibility for the health and safety of any contractors or selfemployed people doing work for them.
- These responsibilities cannot be transferred to any other person, including those people who work alone.
- Inturn, workers have responsibilities to take reasonable care of themselves and other people affected by their work activities and to co-operate with their employers in meeting their legal obligations.

## Identifying the Risks

Risk assessment should be performed to help employers decide on the right level of supervision. There are certain high-risk activities where at least one other person may need to

be present. One example of this is where there is some expectation of unpredictable client behaviour.

Employers who have five or more employees must record the significant findings of all risk assessments. By law, employers must consult all their employees on health and safety matters. Effective consultation will also help ensure that relevant hazards are identified, and appropriate and proportionate control measures are chosen. You can find more advice on HSE's website: www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/managing/consulting.htm.

Lone workers should not be put at greater risk than other employees. Establishing a healthy and safe working environment for lone workers can be different from organising the health and safety of other employees. Your risk assessment process should identify the issues relevant to each circumstance faced by employees.

Employers should take account of all normal work and foreseeable emergencies, e.g. fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents. In particular, employers should identify situations where people may work alone and consider the following:

- Is there a risk of violence and/or aggression?
- Are there any reasons why the individual might be more vulnerable than others and be especially at risk if they work alone (for example if they are young, pregnant, disabled or a trainee)?
- Are suitable arrangements in place to ensure clear communications in an emergency?
- Are there medical conditions which would affect a person's ability to work alone?

Training is particularly important where there is limited supervision. Training may also be crucial in enabling people to cope in unexpected circumstances and with potential exposure to violence and aggression. Employers should set the limits to what can and cannot be done while working alone. They should ensure workers are competent to deal with the requirements of the job and are able to recognise when to seek advice from elsewhere. Although phone or other contact should be encouraged, lone workers may be unable to ask more experienced colleagues for help, so extra training may be appropriate. They need to be sufficiently experienced and fully understand the risks and precautions involved in their work and the locations that they work in. Employers should set limits on what can and cannot be done while working alone. They should ensure workers are competent to deal with the requirements of the job and are able to recognise when to seek advice from elsewhere.

The extent of supervision required depends on the risks involved and the ability of the lone worker to identify and handle health and safety issues. The level of supervision needed is a management decision, which should be based on the findings of a risk assessment, i.e. the higher the risk, the greater the level of supervision required. It should not be left to individuals to decide whether they need assistance.

Where a worker is new to a job, undergoing training, doing a job that presents specific risks, or dealing with new situations, it may be advisable for them to be accompanied when they first take up the post.

**Monitoring**

Procedures must be put in place to monitor lone workers and effective means of communication are essential. These may include:

- supervisors periodically visiting and observing people working alone
- pre-agreed intervals of regular contact between the lone worker and supervisor, using phones, radios or email, bearing in mind the worker's understanding of English
- manually operated warning devices or automatic ones which trigger if specific signals are not received periodically from the lone worker, eg staff security systems
- implementing robust systems that ensure a lone worker returns to their base or home once their task is completed.

Your assessment of the risks should identify foreseeable events. Emergency procedures should be established and employees trained in them. Information regarding emergency procedures should be given to lone workers. Your risk assessment may indicate that mobile workers should carry first-aid kits and/or that lone workers need first-aid training. They should also have access to adequate first-aid facilities.

**Key Considerations for the Lone Worker**

- Do your shoes and clothes hinder movement or ability to run in an emergency?
- Are your clothes bright enough for you to be visible on roads and in dark areas?
- Is your neck attire putting you at risk? Trailing necklaces or ties can spread infection and can also be easily grabbed.
- Keep your keys and a small amount of money separate from your work bag, and along with your mobile phone, always close to hand.
- Always be aware of the exit routes and keep them easily accessible in case of emergency.
- Ask in advance for pet dogs (or other animals) to be restrained if necessary.

- Never lift or move a patient unless trained to do so (always seek guidance and assistance where necessary).
- Ensure heavy equipment cases have handles and wheels (or use a trolley).
- Assess the situation on approach and abandon or postpone a visit if there is anything at all you are uncomfortable with.
- Never be complacent or let your guard down with the patient, carer or relatives.
- If in any doubt at any point, leave at once ("I just need to pop back to base and fetch a [XXX]").
- Never be concerned about causing offence - your safety should always be your first concern.

**Travel**

- Always check fuel before starting journey.
- Plan your route, know where you are going (consider using GPS) and note places of safety, e.g. garages, shops, pubs, en route.
- Ensure that your mobile phone is always charged and switched on and programme emergency numbers in to speed dial.
- Ensure satellite navigation systems, mobile phones and other high value equipment are carried as discreetly as possible and do not leave valuables on display.
- Park in safe and brightly lit areas, as near to the patient's home as possible.
- Park so that you can exit easily without having to manoeuvre. It is better to reverse into a parking space than drive straight in, so you do not have to reverse out.
- When parking in daylight, visualise what the area will be like when you leave in the dark.
- Be particularly vigilant when getting equipment into and out of the vehicle.

**Lone Workers' Responsibilities**

Ensure you are fully familiar and up-to-date with your employer's lone working policies, communications, end of work and emergency arrangements. Always avail yourself of any training provided.

Always follow your employer's lone working guidance and, if not notified, ask your employer at least once a year whether their lone workers policies have changed and whether update training is required.

Ensure your employer is aware of any medical condition you may have. Always put your own safety before all other considerations.

**Reporting Incidents**

Any failure in any of these systems, or any event of concern (however trivial) especially if you have felt threatened should be reported immediately, or on return to base (if appropriate) and recorded in writing. This should include all incidents of verbal abuse.

Depending on the degree of concern and whether the problem has been rectified, employers and staff should formally review all such incidents regularly and ensure that policies, lone working protocols and training are revised accordingly.

**Further Information**

Further information and advice can be found at www.hse.gov.uk
http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf

The lone working policy guidance is available at:
http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/Documents/SecurityManagement/Developing_policy_Lone_Working.pdf

The general lone working guidance to support the above is available at:
http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/Documents/SecurityManagement/Lone_Working_Guidance_2013.pdf

Please contact the Optical Confederation's Domiciliary Eyecare Committee (domiciliary@opticalconfederation.org.uk) or your national representative or professional body for further advice.

Produced by the Optical Confederation's Domiciliary Eye Care Committee - working together for patient and practitioner safety

March 2014