



## OH&S – How to take it off the agenda and put it into action

### THE CHALLENGES FOR A MEDICAL PRACTICE

Medical Practices are run as a Small to Medium size Enterprise (SME) and constantly face the difficulty in keeping up with their legal obligations. One of the hot topics is Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S). How do we manage this ongoing agenda item in an effective and systematic way?

### NATIONAL HARMONISATION

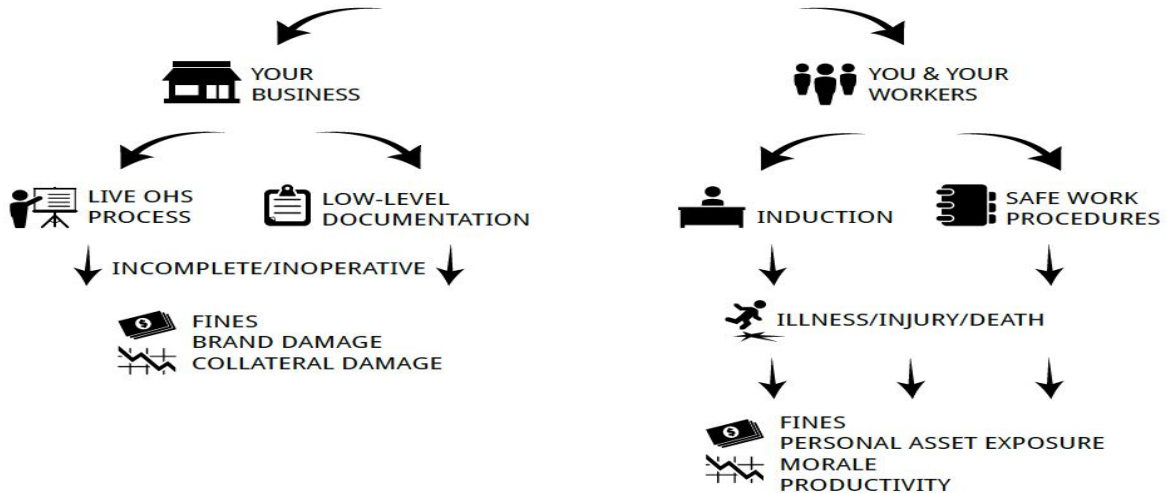
If you proactively try and keep up with safety news in Australia, you would have come across the “hot” safety topic that addresses Occupational Health & Safety Harmonisation in Australia. In a nut shell, the movement seeks to create National standards relating to work health and safety regulations. At the moment, all States, Territories and the Commonwealth are responsible for making and enforcing their own safety laws, which vary in detail and application. Over the past 20 years there has been efforts to make workplace health and safety regulations more consistent by creating National Standards and Codes of Practice. Some of the reasons why several safety experts and organisations believe we need national reform are;

- Developing uniform, equitable and effective safety standards and protections for all workers will result in reductions in the incidence of death, injury and disease in the workplace.
- Inconsistent laws cause confusion for businesses and inequitable safety standards across jurisdictions and industry sectors.
- Multi-state businesses can focus on effective company-wide prevention strategies.

Although 20 years seems quite some time to develop new standard structures, in recent years the initiative seems to be gaining momentum. Early in 2011, public comment was invited for the Model Work Health Safety Regulations.

Safework Australia is the principal player driving national policy development in health and safety and workers compensation.

## NEW NATIONAL OHS LEGISLATION



### WHAT YOU SHOULD BE DOING AT YOUR PRACTICE:

- You (or your delegated staff member) should have a monthly “to-do” checklist, and the results of your actions should be recorded for ongoing Workcover/WorkSafe compliance. You should be able to produce updated reports for management and/or WorkSafe at any time.
- You need to be fully compliant with each state and territory’s OH&S legislation, and be updated regularly to accommodate any changes in OH&S laws for your peace of mind.
- Your practice should be fully compliant with the new National Work Health & Safety Regulations and legislation (Harmonisation), which are due to become effective in 2012. You need to demonstrate a “live OH&S system” under this legislation.
- You need to evaluate your risk exposure, and provide your company with regular step-by-step instructions each month which are based on your industry to reduce your risk.
- You need to ensure you are covering exposure to Statutory Liability fines, and also includes a Directors and Officers Liability component.



## STRATEGIES ON ACHIEVING THESE GOALS:

Practice management consultancy, Specialist Consulting ([www.specialistconsulting.net.au](http://www.specialistconsulting.net.au)), has come across OH&S as an area that is constantly on the agenda of each practice and is not generally addressed in a consistent and effective manner. Bigger practices can delegate this issue to a committee to follow up and oversee, but most medical practices don't have the man power to deal with OH&S in a way that is consistently up to date with current legislation.

Specialist Consulting has identified that outsourcing this very important issue is probably the most effective way of ensuring a safe work place. Companies such as MONIT ([www.monit.com.au](http://www.monit.com.au)) provide this type of service. They provide monthly monitoring of your OH&S requirements and in addition provide resources to maintain OH &S standards at the practice for a low monthly fee.

OH&S will be the new "speed camera" for SME in 2012. Implementing your live OH &S systems as soon as possible will be the key to patient and staff safety and avoiding fines.