In a competitive global marketplace, employers must manage all aspects of their business operations. Safety, productivity and reliability of the workforce are integral to business success; and, Fitness for Duty of the workforce needs to be proactively managed. In the absence of Fitness for Duty programs, there is a potential for incidents, injuries, medical treatment expenses, lost productivity of workers who are unable to return to work following an injury, and even lost productivity of workers who are not able to meet physical demands of their workplace with or without accommodation.

In order to attempt to control these potential effects, the Occupational Health Physician is required to determine the medical fitness for duty of workers in a variety of work settings. The Occupational Health Physician relies heavily on his clinical training and experience to make these determinations but often lacks objective information about the demands of the workplace and the actual physical capacities of the individual worker.

Individuals who have safety sensitive and/or physically strenuous occupations typically undergo a pre-placement / post-offer evaluation or a return to work evaluation following an injury or illness absence. A Fitness for Duty determination is made prior to these workers performing their usual and customary job tasks. Some training is physically strenuous and may or may not be a routine requirement for workers. Individuals who participate in physically strenuous training need to be medically evaluated and cleared prior to participating in that training.

This presentation describes the industry leading best practices to incorporate a medical examination and functional capacity evaluation (FCE) into a medical evaluation protocol, which allows the occupational health provider to make a medical clearance determination for workers to participate in Helicopter Underwater Escape Training (HUET). This training is commonly provided to military personnel or workers in the offshore oil and gas industry who are transported to and from operations by helicopters over water.

The purpose of the training is to prepare the workers in the case of a crash landing over water and involves simulated sinking of the training module in a pool while rotating the module upside down. Students are trained on bracing for impact, identifying exit points, and safely escaping the module. Workers also complete Basic Offshore Safety Induction and Emergency Training (BOSIET) or other Water Survival Training along with the HUET. For consistency of nomenclature, the term HUET will be used in this paper.

The medical evaluation for HUET consists of a health questionnaire and medical exam, cardiovascular screening, FCE and medical clearance. The scope of the HUET FCE is guided by a functional job description that objectively documents the training requirements specific to HUET. This medical evaluation and clearance process also provides a mechanism to periodically monitor individuals who may be required to perform physically strenuous tasks, including those persons for which these tasks may fall outside of their typical day to day activities. These non-routine tasks (i.e. HUET) may not have been envisioned for their position at the time of hire and therefore any significant underlying medical condition would not have been appropriately evaluated.

Providing legal guidance and a framework for fitness for duty programs, the United States Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA 1990) and the ADA Amendments Act (ADA Amended Act 2008). Equivalent legislation has also been enacted in the United Kingdom (The Disability Determination Act 1995, Amended 2005), Australia (Disability Discrimination Act 1992), and Canada (Canadian Human Rights Act and Employment Equity Act 1985, Amended 2012).

Under the ADA, sweeping changes were mandated in the area of medical and functional abilities testing as it relates to hiring practices and medical fitness for work determinations (e.g. return to work evaluations following injury or illness). Medical examinations associated with screening programs for new hires and medical fitness for work determinations are required to be job-specific evaluations related to the essential functions of the job (i.e. the actual physical occupational qualifications).
In order to effectively manage the Fitness for Duty of the workforce while operating within the guidelines established by the ADA and equivalent legislation, a systematic approach is essential to objectively determine a worker’s fitness for duty. An overview of the essential components for fitness for duty programs will be presented. The specific example of application of this methodology to HUET will be discussed.

**REFERENCES**