

# The Salina Journal Archive Edition

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### Performance Profile

#### To reduce injury risk, Salina firm tests workers' physical abilities

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For every employee who sits most of the day typing at a computer, there are workers whose days are filled with bending, lifting, reaching and repetitive movements.

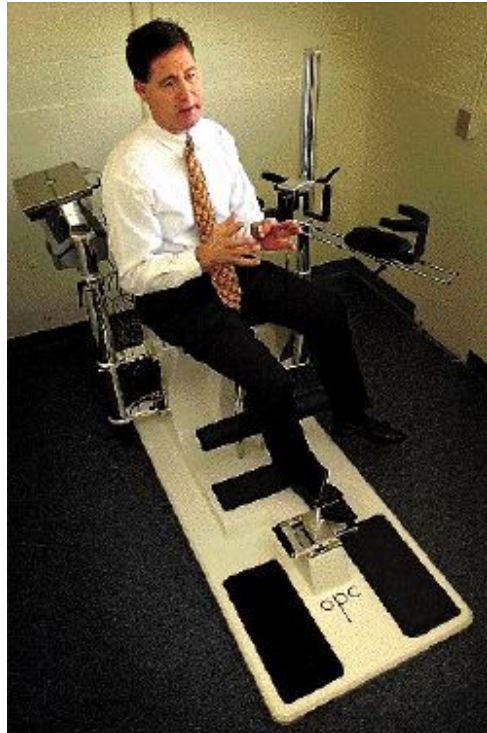
For companies seeking to lower their workers' compensation claims, the ability to match the physical abilities of an employee to the job substantially reduces their risk of injury. It's the reason the Occupational Performance Center of Salina was created in 1988.

Sixteen years later, the center, located at 519 S. Santa Fe, is continuing to grow and expand its services throughout the Midwest.

"What we do that is so unique is we really are in the injury-prevention business," said John Lohmeyer, chief executive officer of the Occupational Performance Center. "So much of work comp occurs after the injury. What we do, passionately, I think, with our clients is we make sure that the people they hire have the physical skills to do what the job requires. And in doing so, we really protect the employee from injury."

The center also utilizes its testing to help employers reduce the physical demands of certain jobs that have a higher risk of injury.

"The day of asking someone to lift a hundred pounds may not be as practical today because with skid loaders and forklifts and things you can put on the back of a pickup truck -- there are mechanical ways around that," Lohmeyer said. "We tend to be aligned with employers who are pretty progressive and want to protect their employees."



TOM DORSEY / Salina Journal

*John Lohmeyer, chief executive officer of the Occupational Performance Center of Salina, 519 S. Santa Fe, sits on the machine that is used to test a person's physical skills.*

## **Measures worker and job**

The Occupational Performance Center's testing utilizes a proprietary, patented measuring instrument called the Physical Capacity Profile Testing System.

About the size of a physician's exam table, the profile testing system is a combination of hardware and computer software that puts workers through a series of simulated squats, lifts and pulls that measure musculoskeletal imbalances.

The data is used in conjunction with other information derived from the employer and employee.

"We require the employer to go into their workplace and take measurements on what is required of their people," Lohmeyer said.

A digital device measures the amount of force used to push or pull an object.

"In doing that, we get exact measurements on what's being required on the job," he said.

The other piece of information is a job description worksheet that lists the estimated amount of physical activity required on the job, such as standing, walking and bending, and more specialized movements such as reaching, balancing and operating machinery controls.

"There's a time element that says if you do a task less than a third of the time, that's occasional," Lohmeyer said. "There's occasional, frequent and constant. What we have found is that in probably 95 percent of the jobs, people do any one task primarily on an occasional basis. Because as humans, we can't stand for eight hours, we can't sit for eight hours. We're always rotating between those things."

The testing procedure is derived from a program developed by the founder and one of the owners of the Occupational Performance Center, Salina orthopedic physician Gary Harbin. Harbin's office is adjacent to the center.

## **Testing in compliance**

The procedure has been validated and is in compliance with standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and HIPAA health information regulations. The profile testing system also is designed to accommodate individuals who are wheelchair bound or who have other disabilities.

Not only is the profile-testing system used to test employees before starting their jobs, it's also used to test a patient's ability to return to work following a medical condition.

The Occupational Performance Center charges \$75 for the testing procedure, which takes a half-hour and includes a medical history questionnaire. The center also has been successful manufacturing and marketing its testing instrument, which costs \$30,000, to 14 other sites in Kansas and Nebraska.

The company is partnered with TRG of Kipp, which does the manufacturing; Eagle Software, 123 Indiana, which does the software design; and the law firm of Clark, Mize and Linville, 129 S. Eighth, which handles employment practice issues.

"We do an unusual amount of support services, because we actually go into their market with our sales people and help make calls on area businesses and convert them (to using the service). We're also involved in national and statewide conferences," Lohmeyer said.

### **Cutting injuries**

Cabinetmaker Crestwood, 601 E. Water Well, has used the Occupational Performance Center successfully for four years to cut down on-the-job injury.

"Since we started using strength-performance testing, we've cut our repetitive motion-type incidents, probably in half," said Rod Claussen, Crestwood's safety coordinator.

Crestwood employs about 180 people. In 2003, about 40 new employees went through OPC's testing before starting work, Claussen said. OPC also does post-hire drug screening for new employees for Crestwood. It's part of a package of services the center offers -- in addition to the physical-capacity profile --including a respiratory fitness test, ergonomic study and video job analysis.

In the future, Lohmeyer said the company will try to develop a regional approach.

"We're working into the Lincoln and Omaha (Neb.) markets. Hopefully, we'll soon be in Iowa, as well," he said. "There are competitors, but none that really have taken a similar approach to what we've done, in terms of focusing on prevention. We've got somewhat of an exclusive niche."

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