



Republic of the Philippines  
Department of Health

**OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY**

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July 27, 2007

**ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER**  
**No. 2007 – 0025**

**SUBJECT: Revised Guidelines for Conducting Medical Fitness Examinations for Seafarers**

**I. RATIONALE**

One of the main thrusts of current health sector reforms under FOURmula One (F1) for Health is regulation. The main objective of regulatory reforms is to ensure access to quality and affordable health products, devices, facilities and services, especially those commonly used by the poor.

The Department of Health is currently updating its standards and technical requirements on medical fitness examinations for seafarers to improve and strengthen the quality of its accreditation and monitoring of medical facilities for overseas workers nationwide. This is in line with F1 regulatory reform objectives.

The guidelines contained in this Administrative Order took into account the recommendations made in the 1995 International Conference on STCW, jointly participated by the International Labor Organization (ILO), International Maritime Organization (IMO) and World Health organization (WHO), and was patterned after the first published 1998 ILO/ WHO Guidelines on the same. This was also a result of several consultations and reviews made with various stakeholders.

**II. OBJECTIVES**

With a significant number of medical clinics, hospitals, and individuals attending to the medical certification requirement of seafarers, this Administrative Order aims to:

- A. Reduce wide differences in medical requirements and examination procedures; and
- B. Provide standards in the conduct of PEME of seafarer candidates and serving seafarers.

**III. SCOPE AND COVERAGE**

These guidelines are promulgated for the compliance of medical examiners in all DOH accredited medical clinics, hospitals and other facilities that issue medical certificates to seafarers as valid indicators of their fitness to work.

All requirements prescribed in this Order shall apply to all categories of seafarers, including new candidates and serving seafarers, with slight variations explained in the context.

#### **IV. DEFINITION OF TERMS**

For purposes of this Order, the following terms and acronyms shall be defined as follows:

1. *Accredited Specialists* – physicians from different medical specialties or subspecialties who are certified by the corresponding specialty or subspecialty boards.
2. *BHFS* – acronym for the Bureau of Health Facilities and Services
3. *CHD* – acronym for the Center for Health Development
4. *DOH* – acronym for the Department of Health
5. *DOH Accredited Medical Clinics* – medical clinics with registered licensed physicians authorized to conduct PEME to overseas workers or seafarers
6. *Ishihara Test* – a commonly used color test chart consisting of a series of plates designed to provide a test for quick and accurate assessment of color vision deficiency
7. *Joint Committee* – a tripartite committee composed of the DOH, the Maritime Industry Authority, and the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency
8. *Manning Agency* – commonly referred to as recruitment agency
9. *New Candidates* – inexperienced seafarers, considered as first-timers who are examined for a seafaring career
10. *PEME* – acronym for Pre-Employment Medical Examination. It refers to the complete medical examination that is implemented on an applicant as a requirement for screening to determine whether he is physically and mentally fit to work.
11. *Pre-Licensure Examinees* – seafarers who are required to undergo medical examination as pre-requisite for taking the licensure examination that is administered by the Professional Regulation Commission
12. *Principals* – employers or ship owners
13. *Restricted Service Health Certificate* – issuance of limited health certificate by the examining physician, the limitations of which may include a particular trade area, period of time or service (sea duties) on board. The most commonly encountered restriction includes “No navigational duties” for color-deficient seafarers.
14. *Revalidation Package* – minimum test requirements used to re-assess the continuing fitness of a seafarer issued a FIT PEME Certificate but not deployed within the ninety (90) day period from date of initial PEME.
15. *Seafarers* – ship officers and ratings that man ships. The following are the categories of seafarers:
  - a) *Cadets* – student learners (deck or engine) performing on-the-job training on board ships;

- b) *Officers* – duly certificated or licensed deck and engine officers
  - c) *Ratings* – a ship’s crew other than the Master or Officers performing deck or engine “watch keeping” duties;
  - d) *Service Providers* – personnel on board commercial ships who provide services other than those that relate to navigation, marine engineering and other technical jobs;
  - e) *Offshore Workers* – personnel deployed in oilrigs, offshore drilling, dredging, production platform, auxiliaries, floating power barges or seismic operations, and other similar contrivance;
  - f) *Fishermen* – people directly or personally and physically engaged in taking or culturing and processing fishery or aquatic resources.
16. *Serving Seafarers* – experienced seafarers, examinees, or returnees to sea duty
17. *Snellen Test* – a chart imprinted with block letters in gradually decreasing sizes, identified according to distances at which they are ordinarily visible. It is used in testing visual acuity.
18. *STCW* – acronym for Standards on Training, Certification and Watchkeeping
19. *Sufficient Visual Field* – a condition of the eye, which renders visual function adequate for seafarer’s duties.

## V. GENERAL GUIDELINES

- A. The BHFS of the DOH shall exercise the accreditation and regulatory functions for medical clinics, hospitals and other facilities in order for them to be authorized to conduct PEME of seafarers.
- B. The BHFS shall be responsible for periodically updating the list of DOH accredited medical clinics and shall make this available to the other members of the Joint Committee.
- C. An Adhoc Medical Arbiter or Peer Group Review Committee shall be created for purposes of arbitration by the Secretary of Health, based on the recommendations of the BHFS, and in response to appeals made by seafarers declared Unfit for Sea Duty or Restricted Service by medical examiners. The Peer Group Review Committee shall be comprised of, but not limited to the following: a physician from a selected government specialty center; an accredited specialist in the area of the case under evaluation; and, a physician from a clinic that is active in Maritime Health. The DOH accredited medical clinic shall be required to submit all pertinent medical information and documents to facilitate a comprehensive review of the diagnosis or recommendation. The decision of the Peer Group Review Committee shall be final.
- D. All DOH accredited medical clinics shall issue PEME Certificates to the referring manning agencies within the thirty (30) day period from date of initial PEME.
- E. Seafarers issued a “pending” or “temporarily unfit for sea duty” certificates may be accommodated for follow-up at the medical clinic beyond the thirty (30) day period if he is issued a referral letter from the manning agency for such purpose.

- F. Seafarers issued a Fit PEME Certificate but not deployed within the ninety day (90) period from date of initial PEME must be appropriately referred to the examining clinic for a re-evaluation of his initial FIT PEME Certificate using the minimum revalidation package/ PEME test requirements such as but not limited to the following: history of present illness and complete physical examination, visual acuity, audiometry, routine urinalysis, complete blood count, chest X-ray and dental examination. Additional electrocardiogram, psychometric examinations and other tests may be prescribed by the examining physician only when PEME finding warrants further investigation.
- G. Seafarers boarding international vessels shall have a Fit PEME Certificate for every contract of sea duty. For seafarers employed locally and considered as regular employees of domestic shipping companies, an initial PEME following the minimum requirements shall be required. The schedule of subsequent medical examinations shall follow company set policies and related medical guidelines.
- H. These guidelines, as well as applicable medical standards by the Maritime Directorate, shall be in effect with or without the concurrence of the host country guidelines.
- I. An inspection tool which prescribes the standards, criteria and technical requirements formulated by the DOH for the issuance of certificate of accreditation, shall be utilized and posted at the DOH website [www.doh.gov.ph](http://www.doh.gov.ph)

## **VI. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES**

### **A. On Medical Examiners**

The authority to conduct PEME of seafarers and issue corresponding medical fitness certificate shall only be vested on medical examiners who possess the following requirements:

- 1. Licensed as physician with experience in general medicine;
- 2. Duly signed Contract of Service with a DOH accredited medical clinic.

### **B. On PEME**

- 1. The PEME shall be administered on the following: Seafarers, including cadets, trainees, regular employees of local shipping lines, contractual employees of foreign-owned shipping companies, and pre-licensure examinees.
- 2. The PEME to be conducted shall, among others, undertake and consider the following procedures and criteria, accordingly:
  - a.) Past medical history of the examinee shall be taken. When necessary, previous medical records of each seafarer candidate/ serving seafarer shall be reviewed.
  - b.) The current Joint National Committee Recommendation on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation and Treatment of High Blood Pressure shall be used for reference. Minimum PEME test

- requirements for seafarers shall follow the Minimum PEME Test Requirements posted at the DOH website [www.doh.gov.ph](http://www.doh.gov.ph)
- c.) Distant and near vision, including color perception test (Ishihara Plates), shall form part of the initial and periodic PEME requirements. Test for primary colors shall be considered in case of defective Ishihara result. It shall not impair the seafarer's capability to work provided it is cleared by an accredited eye specialist or low vision specialist. Results of visual acuity shall be expressed in both decimal and Snellen's notation provided in the format of the PEME Fitness Certification for Seafarers posted at the DOH website [www.doh.gov.ph](http://www.doh.gov.ph)
  - d.) Audiometric exam shall form part of the initial and regular PEME requirements. Hearing acuity shall be measured from 500 Hz to 8000 Hz.
  - e.) Full clinical notes and results of the laboratory, x-ray, ECG, and other examinations shall be kept along with the form describing the examinee's previous medical history duly signed by the examinee as stated in the Instructions to Accredited Medical Clinics posted at the DOH website [www.doh.gov.ph](http://www.doh.gov.ph)
  - f.) Physical capabilities required for entry-level seafarers shall be based on shipboard task, function, event or condition as mentioned under Job Requirements and Fitness Standards posted at the DOH website [www.doh.gov.ph](http://www.doh.gov.ph)
  - g.) In case of crew members of ships in coastal trade, offshore supply vessels, tugboats and barges, the international fitness standard and health requirement of these guidelines may be modified by national maritime authorities, and restricted service health certificates may be issued to the crew members. Nevertheless, the safety of the vessel at sea must be maintained, seafarers' duties must be performed safely, and their health must be safeguarded.

3. Initial and Periodic PEME:

- a.) Serving seafarers need a satisfactory standard of continuing good health throughout their career. An applicant shall be excluded at the initial PEME if there is any doubt about his continuing fitness.
- b.) Flexibility shall be exercised only during examinations for retention of servicing in employment, particularly in the case of seafarers who have spent many years at sea, gained valuable experience and progressed in their professional careers (captains, mates and chief engineers).
- c.) For regular seafarers and employees of domestic shipping companies, allowance shall be made for the inevitable impairment of health that time and chance may bring so that a reasonably fit seafarer can continue at sea until the age of retirement. Nevertheless, firm recommendations have been made in most countries with established Maritime Directorate to exclude persons suffering from significant medical conditions that can render seafarers unfit for sea duty. A list of medical

conditions per System Classification which may render a seafarer unfit are provided under the Medical Standards in the Conduct of PEME for Seafarers posted at the DOH website [www.doh.gov.ph](http://www.doh.gov.ph)

#### 4. Validity of Fit PEME Certificate

- a.) Unless a shorter period is required by reason of the specific duties to be performed by the seafarer concerned or is required under STCW, the following schedule of validity shall hold:
  - i. A medical certificate shall be valid for a maximum period of two years while on board unless the seafarer is under the age of 18, in which case the maximum period of validity shall be one year;
  - ii. A Fit PEME Certificate shall not exceed two (2) years from date it is granted; *Provided that*, the seafarer is issued a Fit PEME Certificate within thirty (30) days from the time of his initial PEME;
  - iii. When a seafarer is promoted on board to a job position with critical functions or specific requirements for the position, the PEME test requirements for the new job position must be passed.
- b.) Offshore workers shall follow the PEME requirements of the host country of the principal.
- c.) In urgent cases, the competent authority shall permit a seafarer to work without a valid medical certificate until the next port of call where the seafarer can obtain a medical certificate from a qualified medical practitioner, provided that:
  - i. The period of such permission does not exceed three months; and
  - ii. The seafarer concerned is in possession of an expired medical certificate of recent date.
- d.) If the period of validity of a certificate expires in the course of a voyage, the certificate shall continue in force until the next port of call where the seafarer can obtain a medical certificate from a qualified medical practitioner, provided that the period shall not exceed three months.
- e.) The medical certificates for seafarers working on ships ordinarily engaged on international voyages must as a minimum be provided in English.

#### C. On the Assessment of PEME Results

1. PEME recommendations shall be given as follows:
  - a.) **Fit for Sea Duty** – The seafarer is assessed as able to perform safely the duties of his position aboard a ship in the absence of medical care, without danger to his health or to the safety of the vessel, crew and passengers.
  - b.) **Unfit for Sea Duty** – The seafarer is assessed to be not fit for sea duty.

- c.) **Temporarily Unfit for Sea Duty** – The seafarer is assessed to be temporarily unfit for sea duty when, at the time of PEME, the result shows an abnormal finding, a suspected medical or surgical condition, or a disclosed significant past medical history which needs further investigation and reevaluation. The examinee shall be given thirty (30) days to undergo further assessment in accordance with the established referral system of the accredited medical clinic. Within the said period, the seafarer may either be medically upgraded to fitness or downgraded to unfitness indefinitely based on the results of the follow-up evaluation.
- d.) For purposes of PEME status reporting to manning agency, the term classifications shall be utilized by accredited clinics with regard the following cases:
  - i. **Pending for PEME Completion** – When a seafarer has not completed the PEME test requirements on day one of his initial PEME, the seafarer shall be given five (5) working days to complete the requirements.
  - ii. **Pending for completion of Prescribed Additional Tests, Observation, Monitoring or Treatment** – When a seafarers' condition during PEME falls under borderline cases and the findings are observable, treatable or manageable within the fourteen (14) days after the date of initial PEME, the seafarer becomes eligible for employment at sea upon favorable recommendation of the medical examiner.
- e.) An acute condition that poses as threat to the health of the seafarer, crew and passengers, or the safety of the vessel disqualifies the person from service until there is a complete recovery.
- f.) When reexamining a seafarer, after a period of illness, the medical examiner must consider the limited availability of medical care on board ship, the duration of the voyage, and the effects of specific medical findings on the safety of the crew and vessel.
- g.) Serving seafarers declared unfit for sea duty may appeal their case to the BHFS.

## VII. VIOLATIONS

Any violation of this Administrative Order by any medical clinic for overseas workers shall be penalized under Section IX Paragraph 2 of Administrative Order No. 181 s. 2004.

## VIII. REPEALING CLAUSE

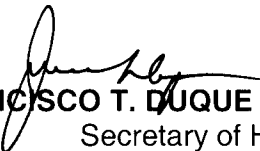
Provisions from previous issuances that are inconsistent or contrary to the provisions of this Order are hereby rescinded and modified accordingly.

**IX. SEPARABILITY CLAUSE**

In the event that any provision or part of this Order be declared unauthorized or rendered invalid by any court of law or competent authority, those provisions not affected by such declaration shall remain valid and effective.

**X. EFFECTIVITY**

This Order shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its approval and publication in the official gazette or newspaper of general circulation.

  
**FRANCISCO T. DUQUE III, M.D., M.Sc.**  
Secretary of Health