

# Hospital Workers Meeting Kit



## What's At Stake

Hospital administrators, custodians, cooks, aides, nurses, and doctors work in a challenging environment. Hospitals operate 24/7, on weekends and holidays, and must be ready at any time of the day or night for emergency situations.

## What's the Danger

### Health Care Workers Get Injured or Sick in the Workplace

The injury rate among health care and social assistance workers is higher than any other sector. The work-related illness and injuries faced by health care workers are even greater than those belonging to manufacturing and construction industry. According to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five nonfatal occupational injuries reported in 2013 occurred among health care workers. Nursing aides, attendants, and orderlies suffered the highest rates of musculoskeletal disorders.

Other people working in health care facilities are also facing similar hazards. People working in the medical equipment maintenance, mechanical maintenance, building and grounds maintenance, food service, laundry, housekeeping, and administrative staff have reported nonfatal injuries and illnesses in the workplace.

## HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

### RISK REDUCTION AND ELIMINATION

1. **Precautions to Avoid Bloodborne Pathogens.** Health care workers often come in contact with patients' body fluids and are therefore exposed to bloodborne pathogens. In this case, bacterial and viral infections are transmitted through blood and other body fluids. The risk for infection increases when a worker comes in contact with these fluids. Health care workers should therefore take necessary precautions and wear personal protective equipment to avoid contamination. Gowns, gloves, safety goggles, and face shields will keep body fluids off the worker's skin.

The hospital/health care facility must also ensure proper management of exposures and reduce/kill the presence of infection-causing micro-organisms within the facility. Some of the best practices include:

- Practicing hand hygiene
- Using antiseptics and disinfectant on skin prior to a surgical procedure or I.V.

injection

- Cleaning and decontamination of instruments

Workers who could be exposed also must be immunized against hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and other bloodborne or airborne pathogens.

1. **Be Careful with Sharps Injuries.** Scalpels, needles, and other sharp objects that have been used in medical facilities are usually contaminated. Health care workers often come in contact with them. To avoid health hazards arising from them, it is important to follow an appropriate disposal system for all sharps and infectious waste. In addition, workers must be careful when handling sharp items because sharps injuries usually increase the risk of infectious diseases.

Avoid the use of needles, if possible. Today, many hospitals and medical facilities in the United States have reduced needle usage, using alternate routes through hands-free techniques. Other practices to reduce or eliminate risk of sharp injuries include disposing of syringes at the point of use in a safety box, no recapping of needles, using blunt suture needles and scalpel blades with rounded tips, passing sharp instruments in basins, using disposable gloves, etc.

1. **Use Proper Devices to Reduce Risk of Musculoskeletal Injuries.** Musculoskeletal injuries are common with medical professionals who have to lift immobile patients and/or transfer them between beds and wheelchairs. This puts those workers at risk for musculoskeletal disorders, which injure their bones, muscles, ligaments, nerves, joints, cartilage, tendons, or blood vessels in the back, limbs, neck, or head.

To protect yourself from musculoskeletal disorders and severe pains, use assistive devices such as slip sheets, slings, and electronic hoists whenever possible. If you don't have access to these devices, at least use the correct body mechanics for reducing the risk of injury; for example, keep your feet apart and knees bent when lifting an immobile patient.

1. **Train Employees to be Safe against Chemical Hazards.** Some chemicals used in the health care industry may cause serious diseases such as cancer, reproductive disorders, neurological diseases, asthma, and developmental disorders. The likes of such hazardous chemicals include mercury, phthalates, bisphenol A, and triclosan. Medical workers can be exposed to chemotherapeutic agents and medications, which are harmful and need to be handled properly.

According to OSHA, medical facilities need to train employees about how to handle hazardous substances safely. In addition, medical professionals must be provided access to safety data sheets with details of composition of each chemical used in the facility and their potential dangers.

1. **Provide Fire Safety Training.** Although the number of fires in hospitals and hospices is declining each year, the National Fire Protection Association reports that there were 5,540 incidents in 2010. Operating rooms are at the highest risk because they contain flammable gas and other materials such as oxygen, methane, hydrogen, nitrous oxide, plastic masks, antiseptic agents, and cloth drapes.

Hospitals and medical facilities should minimize the fire risk by taking proper precautions, such as using water-soluble materials for covering flammable parts of the body; preventing the buildup of nitrous oxide and oxygen; using fire-retardant surgical drapes and keeping electrocautery tools in proper places.

## **SAFETY AND HEALTH MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Leadership.** Managers demonstrate their commitment to improved safety and health, communicate this commitment, and document safety and health performance. They make

safety and health a top priority, establish goals and objectives, provide adequate resources and support, and set a good example.

**Participation.** Employees, with their distinct knowledge of the workplace, ideally are involved in all aspects of the program. They are encouraged to communicate openly with management and to report safety and health concerns.

**Hazard identification.** Processes and procedures are in place so organizations can continually identify workplace hazards and evaluate risks. There is an initial assessment of hazards and controls, as well as regular reassessments.

**Hazard prevention and control.** Programs are implemented to eliminate or control workplace hazards and to achieve safety and health goals. Progress in implementing controls is tracked.

**Education and training.** All employees are educated about or trained in hazard recognition and control and their responsibilities under the program.

**System evaluation.** Processes are established to monitor the system's performance, verify its implementation, identify deficiencies and opportunities for improvement, and take actions to improve the system and overall safety and health performance.

## **FINAL WORD**

While it is true that health care professionals face various safety hazards from the first time they step into a medical facility, there are ways to prevent or at least minimize the risks. The hospitals and the medical facilities must take responsibilities to make the workplace as safe as possible for the workers.