

Are health care workers safe at work?

Learning from incident reporting: Prevalence of safety risks and occupational injuries.

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Introduction

In daily practice, physiotherapists provide treatment and work place interventions for health care workers (HCWs) being injured at work. Occupational injuries are unfortunately common, often resulting in mental and musculoskeletal disorders.

Purpose

This retrospective study explores registered incidents and injuries among HCWs, with a particular focus on type of injuries, who get injured and situations they occurred.

Methods

At the regional level there are 21 county councils providing health care in Sweden. The Patient and Workers Safety Study (PAWSS) was conducted in a county council in eastern Sweden focusing on patients and HCWs injuries during 2011-2014. Data were retrieved from the incident reporting systems (IRS). This part of the study included HCWs injuries during these four years. An injury is defined as a harmful incident. The number of employed HCWs were 12.220 in 2014.

The analysis is based on 1702 (87% women) and mean age was 42 years (SD 12.7). HCWs incident reports included: age, sex, profession, injury levels. Free text describing the sequence was classified. In total, 2436 injuries were reported.

Results

Prevalence of reported incidents was 3.4 %. The majority of injuries were registered from medicine clinics (18%), surgical clinics (17%), primary and home care (11%) and emergency wards (10%).

The incidents were categorized in five injury severity levels; Death (two HCWs), 3% required treatment and resulted in permanent harm; 13% required treatment but did not result in permanent harm; 59% did not require treatment; 25% had a risk situation.

Injuries among different health care workers (n=1702)	%
Nurses	41.6
Assistant nurse	22.5
Dental personnel	6.6
Mental health personnel	6.0
Physicians	5.9
Biomedical analyst	4.5
Physiotherapist/OT	2.7
Midwife	2.1
Other	9.1

Results

85% of the incidents happened at work, the rest while commuting to and home from work. Most common type of injury at work was:

- Sharp needle or puncture injury:.....44.1%
- Threat and work place violence:.....18.6%
- Patient manual handling:.....10.2%
- Slips, trips and falls:.....8.1%
- Exposed to body fluids/substances:.....6.3%
- Hazardous contact with equipment:.....3.5%
- Manual handling and transportation:.....3.3%

Reported work situations caused several occupational injuries. Most commonly reported body locations where "trunk, shoulder, arm, hand pain" (11.2%) and lower back pain (8.4%) happening mostly when reaching, bending, lifting and, mostly related to manual patient handling.

Many involved in work place violence and high work demands reported mental illness (6.1%).



Conclusions

Incident reports capture information that provides a learning opportunity by identifying injury risk situations.

The most commonly reported injuries were wounds from sharp instruments or needles, violence at work and manual patient handling including positioning, transferring, lifting and trips and falls causing shoulder/arm and back pain.

Recommendations

The results indicates that preventive measures need to be taken, including occupational health interventions focusing on the work system, work tasks and safety at work.

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