



SAFETY AT WORK BULLETIN

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Violence Against Health Workers Increases

October 2 2005

Violence in the workplace is a growing concern for health care workers, prompting the call for better surveillance, prevention and protection measures. The current issue of the Medical Journal of Australia looks at the statistics, examines the risks and looks at programs for managing aggression and violent behaviour in general practice, tertiary hospitals and emergency departments.

Dr Klee Benveniste, Research Fellow at the Australian Patient Safety Foundation (APSF) in Adelaide, and colleagues examined the data collected using the Australian Incident Monitoring System (AIMS). They found that among 42 338 incidents reported from 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2002, 9 per cent of all incidents involved patients and physical violence or violent verbal exchange. Staff injury was reported in 5 per cent of cases.

The proportion of incidents involving violence was higher in emergency departments (16 per cent, with frequent involvement of mental health problems or alcohol or drug intoxication), and mental health units (28 per cent).

With the closure of public psychiatric hospitals in the past decade, more patients with mental illness are seeking care in public hospital emergency departments, say the authors.

AIMS analysis highlights the importance of understanding the contributing and precipitating factors in violent incidents, and supports a variety of preventive initiatives, including de-escalation training for staff; violence management plans; improved building design to protect staff and patients; and fast-tracking of patients with mental health problems as well as improved waiting times in public hospital emergency services.

Mr John Forster and colleagues from Austin Health in Victoria say that strategies to prevent and manage violence and aggression in the health care setting have become a primary health and safety issue. Through a series of vignettes, they highlight key elements in developing a program for preventing violent behaviour and aggression in a tertiary hospital.

Key components of the program include staff education and training, risk assessment and management practices, the use of patient contracts and policy development.

Parker Magin and colleagues from the University of Newcastle say that occupational violence is a considerable problem in Australian urban general practice.

Their research showed that about 64 per cent of GPs who responded to a survey had experienced violence in the previous year. The most common forms of violence were "low-level" violence: verbal abuse (42.1 per cent), property damage or theft (28.6 per cent) and threats (23.1 per cent). A smaller proportion of GPs had experienced "high-level" violence:

sexual harassment (9.3 per cent) and physical abuse (2.7 per cent).

They found violence was significantly more likely to be directed towards female GPs, less experienced GPs and GPs working in areas of social disadvantage, mental health problems and drug and alcohol problems. Younger GPs and GPs providing after hours care were also at greater risk.

The authors concluded that formal education programs in preventing and managing violence would be appropriate for GPs and doctors-in-training.

Associate Professor Marcus Kennedy, Director of Emergency Services at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, says violence in emergency departments (EDs) has reached a level that requires concerted action and a shift in attitude – to eradicate a socially and professionally unacceptable peril. In some EDs, violence is a daily occurrence, with nursing staff reporting several episodes each week. He says violence in emergency departments is often under-reported — in a setting of care victims are likely to excuse the behaviour and lack the time required to complete reports on violent incidents. The key to successful intervention is a strong preventive orientation.

Dr Claire Mayhew and Professor Duncan Chappell, in an editorial in the same issue of the Journal, say that although in Australia the risk of death or serious physical injury from a violent workplace incident is quite remote, each year about one Australian health worker is murdered at work and large numbers are either verbally abused, bullied or assaulted. They say the challenge for health authorities is to implement effective preventive strategies and a zero-tolerance policy.

All workplace violence prevention strategies should be multi-faceted and organisation-wide, and involve widespread consultation with all workers in their development and implementation, say the authors.

Source: Australian Medical Association.

New National Asbestos Codes of Practice have been adopted in the Northern Territory.

On 14 September 2005 the Northern Territory adopted the following Codes of Practice as approved Codes of Practice under the Work Health Act for the purpose of providing practical guidance on matters relating to asbestos:

- National Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos [NOHSC:2002(2005)],

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- National Code of Practice for the Management and Control of Asbestos in Workplaces [NOHSC:2018(2005)]
- Guidance Note on the Membrane Filter Method for Estimating Airborne Asbestos Fibres [NOHSC:3003(2005)]

Source: NT WorkSafe

Experienced pilot walks into moving helicopter blade

October 4 2005

A pilot with more than 30 years' experience has serious head injuries after walking into a rotating helicopter blade at Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

Police said the 58-year-old flying instructor walked into one of the helicopter's slow-moving main blades at the Sunshine Coast Airport around 9.20am (AEST) today.

The pilot had completed a flight with a trainee when he shut down the two-seat Hughes 300 chopper, removed his helmet and walked into the blade.

He sustained a compound fracture to the skull and was airlifted in the Energex Community Rescue Helicopter to the Royal Brisbane Hospital in a serious condition.

The pilot was from the Sunshine Coast and had worked as a flying instructor with Becker Helicopters, based at the airport, for three years.

Becker Helicopters chief executive Jan Becker said staff and trainees were receiving counselling. "It's just one of those things," she said.

Energex pilot John Hodges said the blades were moving at a relatively slow speed of between 20 and 30 revolutions a minute when the accident occurred. "He was lucky the blades were moving relatively slowly," he said. "Had they been going at full speed it would have been all over for him." AAP

Work Life Balance Disturbed By Need To Impress The Boss

October 5 2005

40% of employees say the single thing that most disturbs their work/life balance is doing work that is not strictly required but is needed to uphold their position according to a survey of 807 people by Talent2, Australia's leading recruitment firm.

And 39% of respondents say what encroaches on their personal time is having to do required work but in unpaid hours.

Mr Craig Sneesby of Talent2 says females are more likely to have to complete work in unpaid time than their male counterparts, but males are more likely to do work

that is not strictly required but is needed to uphold their position in the office.

"Overtime but unpaid work seems to be prevalent in the banking/finance, computer/information technology and construction sectors according to respondents and the need to impress with work completed merely to uphold positions is reportedly in the domain of the legal and sales/marketing sectors.

"It's the younger workers who are made to do unpaid overtime too with nearly half of the respondents in the 18-24 and 25-34 age brackets saying they are required to do work but don't get additional money.

"Those in the 35-44 and 45-54 year old age group however, stay at the grindstone doing work that is not strictly necessary but they do it to impress the boss with their diligence.

"And if you are the CEO of the company you are not exempt from doing that extra bit of work and proving your commitment with 49% saying they need to uphold their position with extra work. This syndrome affects mid level and senior managers too.

"Unpaid overtime is the bane and torment of the lives of administrative/clerical and blue collars workers.

Source: Talent2

Funeral directors among those to get anti-viral drugs

October 10 2005

Funeral directors, health care personnel and electricity and water supply workers could be among the first to get anti-viral treatment in the event of a pandemic influenza outbreak.

Only 10 per cent of the four million doses of the stockpile of the drugs Relenza and Tamiflu would be distributed to the general population with the rest to be allocated to essential workers, a News Limited report said today.

The workers are among key groups identified in the detailed Australian Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza, which outlines access to Australia's emergency stockpile of anti-viral drugs, the report said.

A spokeswoman for Health Minister Tony Abbott said the stockpile was designed for health workers and people who would keep the country running.

An effective vaccine would need to be developed, but that could take up to three months from the time of identification of the flu virus.

If the bird flu currently sweeping Asia mutated to a human-to-human transmissible virus and affected 25 per cent of the population, the management plan estimates there could be up to 44,000 deaths if no vaccine or anti-viral treatment is available.

AAP

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Man killed in welding accident

October 7 2005

A 46-year-old man was killed when the tyre he was welding exploded in far north Queensland.

The man died about 3.40pm (AEST) yesterday as he worked at mechanical repair shop Top End Motors in Bamaga, about 20kms south of Cape York, police said. He suffered massive head injuries and died instantly.

It was believed the heat from the welder caused the tyre to explode. Police and Workplace Health and Safety officers are investigating.

AAP

Adobe Acrobat V7 Information

Some readers have expressed difficulty in upgrading to the latest version of Acrobat Reader with one of the problems being that the download can be over 25 megabytes - a substantial burden to dial-up internet connections.

Safety At Work publishers are now allowed to distribute the latest edition of Acrobat Reader on a CD. If you want a copy of Acrobat Reader 7.00 please email me at jonesk@sia.org.au and include your full postal address. A CD will be mailed to you shortly after.

The CD won't be pretty as it is a burnt copy of the software that Adobe permits us to distribute. It is not allowed to be given to anyone other than the person requesting the CD and all CDs will be checked with Norton Antivirus before distribution.



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Canberra's Safety Month

October 5 2005

ACT Minister for Industrial Relations, Ms. Katy Gallagher, has today announced the ACT's annual Health and Safety Month which will run from 4 to 31 October.

"Opt for Safety in October, is the theme for this year's Health and Safety Month. It is important for all workplaces to think, talk and act on health and safety issues to stop injuries occurring and to create safe places for everyone," Ms. Gallagher said.

A full program of activities by workplaces participating in Health and Safety Month will be published in a Calendar of Events to appear in the Canberra Times on 5 October. Workplaces have registered their interest with ACT WorkCover to have their events included in the publication.

"Over 150 events and activities have been registered by workplaces for this year's Health and Safety Month, many of them open to the public," Ms Gallagher said.

There are on average 3,500 workplace injuries resulting in accepted workers compensation claims each year in the ACT private sector. The events during Health and Safety Month showcase many solutions to hazards that give rise to these injuries, and should if addressed, prevent these injuries occurring in the future.

"Workplace injuries affect about 4% of the ACT's private sector workforce (of about 90,000 employees) each year and this is something the community is entitled to be concerned about. Working together, sharing knowledge and finding solutions to health and safety risks, can make a difference and prevent workplace deaths, injuries and illnesses."

"Health and Safety Month is about encouraging safe and healthy workplaces and I encourage everyone to get involved," Ms. Gallagher concluded.

Source: Minister For Industrial Relations

Continued from page 2

New Comcare Permanent Impairment Guide Ensures Fairness And Certainty

4 October, 2005

The Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Kevin Andrews, has approved Comcare's new Guide to the Assessment of the Degree of Permanent Impairment.

"The new Guide will commence from the 1st of March next year and is the result of detailed and extensive consultation with all interested stakeholders", Mr Andrews said.

The original Guide has not been updated since its inception in 1989, despite one of the main sources for the Guide, the Department of Veterans Affairs Guide to the assessment of the rate of veterans' pensions, being revised three times since 1989 and is now in its 5th edition.

The Government through Comcare, has determined that the new Guide will contain two parts:

Part 1 will apply to all Commonwealth employees who are not members or former members of the ADF and contains the updated assessment procedures.

Part 2 will apply to members and former members of the ADF who have an injury that occurred during Defence service prior to the commencement of the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004. This section will have exactly the same assessment procedures as the previous edition.

"It is only fair that military personnel, who often sustain injuries and do not lodge a claim until well after the event, should not be disadvantaged by any changes to the Guide. This means that for current and former members of the ADF there is no change to their arrangements", Mr Andrews said.

The new Guide will ensure that there is fairness and certainty for all permanent impairment claimants. More information is available at <http://www.comcare.gov.au>

Source: The Minister for Workplace Relations

Push for umbrella workplace privacy law

October 5 2005

The Victorian Law Reform Commission has called for legislation to protect against invasion of privacy at work, including an independent monitor to probe alleged breaches.

Chairperson Marcia Neave described the proposed legislation as the first of its

kind in the world to comprehensively tackle workplace privacy.

"Privacy is a fundamental right which international law recognises," she said. "But our domestic law at the moment doesn't have very much to say about the balance which should be struck between employers' legitimate need and workers' rights to privacy. Technology has surged ahead with new ways to monitor, test and track workers, but our laws have lagged behind."

The commission's report tackles a range of workplace privacy issues including email monitoring, video surveillance, drug and alcohol testing and genetic testing. It recommends so-called "light touch" legislation with advisory codes of practice for employers in some areas such as email monitoring. But mandatory codes would be imposed on more intrusive monitoring including video surveillance and drug and alcohol testing.

Professor Neave said it was "rarely justifiable" for employers to put employees under surveillance outside work or to demand genetic testing.

Under the proposed law employers would need authority from a regulator for such testing and tracking of workers.

The commission has called for a complete ban on video surveillance in toilets and change-rooms even if employees have given their consent.

Attorney-General Rob Hulls said he would take the proposals to a meeting with other state and territory attorneys-general to push for uniform workplace privacy legislation across the nation.

"It is my view that current laws are inadequate, that the current regime is inadequate, because there are a whole range of circumstances where workplace privacy is being invaded inappropriately," he said. "Workers would be surprised to know that there is not an appropriate regulatory regime to cover privacy issues in the workplace."

Victorian Trades Hall secretary Brian Boyd called for the state government to act swiftly in legislating the proposals. We need those laws now," he said.

"We need in particular the mandatory code that's been recommended by the Law Reform Commission that takes care of covert surveillance and also taking of bodily fluids of working people in their workplaces."

Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry government relations manager David Gregory acknowledged employees' privacy should be protected but rejected the proposal for mandatory regulation of employers' actions. Mr Gregory said employers would accept the need for "guidance material" for their monitoring activities. "We're not yet convinced that we need to go beyond that," he said. AAP

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Transport safety laws toughened

October 6 2005

An independent body will be created to oversee rail, bus and marine safety investigations in Victoria as part of the most far reaching transport safety reforms in decades, the state government has announced.

Transport Minister Peter Batchelor said one of two transport Bills introduced into parliament today would establish a dedicated and expert body to conduct major investigations.

Mr Batchelor said the new Transport Safety Offices would be granted powers of entry, inspection, search and seizure.

The second Bill would alter rail safety regulation, in particular to require anyone working in the rail sector to better identify and manage potential safety risks within their control.

It will also allow the Public Transport Safety Director to prosecute or suspend rail safety

accreditation over breaches of the legislation.

"We are going to put even more effort into preventing public transport and marine fatalities and injuries by adopting the best safety practices from around Australia and the world," Mr Batchelor said.

The maximum penalty for breaching safety duties would be increased from \$200,000 to \$900,000.

The reforms follow a comprehensive review of Victoria's current safety laws and the findings of several rail accidents including the Waterfall accident in NSW, Mr Batchelor said. AAP

Mines Safety Goes On The Road

October 6, 2005

WA's resources boom and the corresponding increase in mining activity have led to a reminder to the mining industry not to overlook safety.

And the Resources Safety Division of DOCEP is making sure the industry has access to all the current information with the Mines Safety Roadshow this month.

The Roadshow is being made available to the minerals industry for the first time so employers and employees can access information on safety issues and network with those who have similar interests.

State Mining Engineer Martin Knee said today that the Roadshow would bring information into regional areas and provide many opportunities that had not previously been available.

"The Roadshow is being undertaken in response to demand from the industry for easy access to information on safety issues and changes to the safety laws," Mr Knee said.

During October, the Mines Safety Roadshow will visit Karratha, Port Hedland, Newman, Kalgoorlie and Bunbury, with a session in Perth at the end of the month. One of the main topics for discussion will be the changes to the Mines Safety and Inspection Act that came into effect in April.

Another important issue the Roadshow will cover is the reporting requirements for injuries and incidents on mine sites and in exploration areas.

Further information on the Mines Safety Roadshow can be obtained by telephoning Resources Safety on 9222 3438 or on the website at www.docep.wa.gov.au/ResourcesSafety. Source: DOCEP

ADVERTISEMENT

Customised Safety Publications

Recently the publishers of **Safety At Work** magazine completed the production of a guide on manual handling for one of the fire services in Australia.

Manual handling is the major hazard for firefighters and the Brigade needed a plain English guide for the firefighters to read, follow and understand.

The guide is over 30 pages and includes



photographs of hazards and control measures of the firefighters during their daily tasks.

The control suggestions are in line with current Australia manual handling regulations and have been verified by a qualified Ergonomist.

At the launch of the guide, a WorkSafe representative said the guide was

"fantastic, nicely presented...it makes people think through the process".

The guide was written by an OHS Safety Practitioner in detailed consultation with Fire Brigade representatives.

If your company or industry could use a guide that includes photos of real tasks in your workplace with text and a format that your employees will understand, contact Kevin Jones of Workplace Safety Services P/L through

www.safetyatwork.biz or directly at jonesk@safetyatwork.biz

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