

Blood and body fluid exposure in the workplace

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Background and Objectives

Blood and body fluids (BBF) are the most common route by which blood-borne viruses and other infections such as HIV and Hepatitis are transmitted to healthcare workers (HCWs). Such infections pose high risks to HCWs, especially where basic rules of occupational health and safety (OHS) are not applied. This study was conducted to determine knowledge, attitudes and practices of HCWs regarding exposure to blood and body fluids at Thebe District Hospital in Thabo Mofutsanyana in the Eastern Free State.

Methods

A questionnaire investigating BBF exposures, reporting of exposures, and HCWs' knowledge of infection control and occupational health resources was distributed to all HCWs in 11 high-risk departments in the hospital; 74 (88%) of 101 questionnaires were returned. Data were captured into SPSS and descriptive statistics were generated.

Results and Discussion

Awareness of OHS contact points can be improved. The majority (82.4%) of respondents knew how to contact occupational health services; 74% knew how to contact the Infection Control Service; but only 62% knew how to contact Health and Safety representatives. Most (84.9%) indicated that they had no needle stick or BBF exposure in the past 6 months; 9 out of 11 respondents who experienced exposure reported these exposures. Exposures were significantly greater for HCWs with less than 6 years of work experience in their departments. Risks were greater in casualty, maternity and male wards. The majority (83.3%) of respondents reported being vaccinated for Hepatitis B; but only 59.5% completed all doses. Nearly one third (29.7%) either did not complete or could not remember. Reasons for not being vaccinated or not completing all doses included forgetting and not knowing about immunisation services. There were shortcomings in knowledge concerning BBF. Only 54.3% of respondents knew needles should never be recapped; 44.9% knew gloves should be used all the time; and 63.4% knew cleaners should use latex gloves when cleaning. Incorrect knowledge was associated with needle pricks and BBF exposure, with all (4) incorrectly informed enrolled nursing assistants experiencing being exposed, while none of those (9) correctly informed being exposed.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Too many respondents did not know enough about dealing with BBF exposures. Despite this, HCWs take immunisation for Hepatitis B seriously, most take precautions to avoid BBF exposures, and most report exposures. Awareness of OHS at Thebe District Hospital needs improvement. *Immediate* induction for new employees would help improve awareness of OH services. OHS representatives need to be more proactive within their units. More training is needed on sharps disposal and the importance of using personal protective equipment.