

Infection Prevention and Control
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Dear Colleagues

Re: Implementation Guidance for the European Union Framework Agreement on Sharps Injuries

The European Social partners in the hospital and healthcare sector signed a Europe-wide framework agreement on the prevention of sharps injuries on 17 July 2009. Under legal binding agreements there is a requirement to implement the Directive within two years in the United Kingdom.

The purpose of this letter is to inform independent contractors of ways of achieving compliance with the framework agreement and your responsibilities as employers of staff within a health care setting. This will ensure a safe working environment, prevent injuries to workers caused by all medical sharps, and protect workers at risk.

The Directive applies to any person employed by an employer, including trainees and apprentices, sub- contracted or agency workers and will therefore include locums.

The following principles must be observed in order to comply with the above:

- Have a well trained adequately resourced workforce in preventing risks
- Provide a safe working environment
- Ensure consultation is completed on the choice and use of safer equipment
- Ensure that you understand your duty of care as the employer to ensure the health and safety of workers, as well as individuals being responsible for their own safety
- Ensure that you evaluate risks which cannot be avoided and look to reducing those risks to the lowest level reasonably possible. A risk assessment must be conducted where there is a potential for injury or exposure to blood or other infectious material.

- Identify and combat risks at source and to reduce risks to a minimum.
- Evaluate the need to take into account the use of personal and protective equipment and where indicated provide them to at risk staff.
- Ensure that there is a robust incident reporting system which should focus on systemic factors (causation) rather than individual mistakes.

Appropriate measures to minimise the risks would include the provision of safer needle devices and sharps containers. When considering safety medical devices the following selection criteria should be applied:

- the device must not compromise patient care.
- the device must perform reliably.
- the safety mechanism must be an integral part of the safety device not a separate accessory.
- the device must be easy to use and require little change of technique on the part of the healthcare professional.
- the device must not create other safety hazards or sources of blood exposure.

Employers should ensure appropriate measures to raise awareness among employees as part of the Directive. This will include training on policies and procedures associated with the prevention and management of sharps injuries during the induction for all new and temporary staff, and at regular intervals thereafter.

I hope that this information supports you in implementing the requirements of this directive.

Yours sincerely



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