



## **EFN POSITION PAPER ON THE PREVENTION OF SHARP INJURIES**

The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) represents over one million nurses and is the independent voice of the profession. The mission of EFN is to promote the interests, status and practice of the profession of nursing in the EU.

Injuries caused by needles and other sharp medical devices and the related risk of potentially fatal disease transmission are a major threat to the health and safety of healthcare workers across the EU. The risk of sharps injuries can be a strong disincentive to taking up a medical career and the distress, sickness and absenteeism resulting from sharps injuries constitutes a considerable strain on the already limited human resources in the medical profession.

Percutaneous injury from blood contaminated syringes is the primary route through which healthcare workers occupationally acquire blood borne and potentially fatal diseases. High-risk procedures include blood collection, IV cannulation and percutaneously placed syringes. Suture needles, scalpel blades and glass items used daily by hospital staff also offer real risk if these devices have been in contact with contaminated blood.

The majority of sharps injuries are suffered by nurses, but other health care workers and ancillary staff such as cleaners, are also at risk. In addition, medical devices incorporating needles are frequently used for self-treatment outside of the conventional healthcare setting and this can create additional dangers for the general public.

In an average hospital, workers incur approximately 12 to 30 needle-stick injuries per 100 beds each year. However, it is estimated that between 60% and 80% of incidents go unreported. If suffering an injury from a contaminated 'sharp', the risk of transmission of infections is 1 in 3 workers for hepatitis B, 1 in 30 for hepatitis C and 1 in 300 for HIV. There can be considerable mental suffering since a lengthy process of diagnostic procedures must be followed before it is known if a serious disease has been contracted.

We call on the EU Institutions to ensure consistent compliance with existing EU Worker Safety and Health Directives among EU healthcare providers, in particular:

- Better information and education of healthcare workers on the risks of exposure, prevention methods and effective incident reporting;
- Safer working practices, including the use of protective clothing, safe disposal, and effective response in case of injury;
- Use of 'Sharps Protection' Technology especially for high-risk medical procedures.

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