



**Joint Statement by**  
**The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) and the International Council of Nurses (ICN)**

**Safe Needles Save Lives**  
**Nurses Call for EU Action Aimed at Safer Needle Devices**

**Summary**

Injuries caused by needles and other sharp medical devices and the related risk of infection with potentially fatal disease are a major threat to the health and safety of nurses across the European Union today. The physical, social and psychological suffering, the distress, sickness and absenteeism resulting from sharps injuries constitute a considerable strain on the already difficult working conditions and limited workforce.

**What are the specific risks to nurses?**

Nurses suffer the majority of sharps injuries. These occur in patient rooms and the operating theatre. Doctors, auxiliary staff, cleaners and laundry staff are also at risk. Additionally 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. Many injuries occur as a result of failure to properly dispose of the sharp item. In this case there is additional suffering as the source patient is unknown.

It is estimated that healthcare workers in Europe suffer 1 million needle stick injuries each year, of which 40% relates to nurses. In 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.

Needlestick injury from hollow bore blood filled sharp objects 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 injection. 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.

**European Solutions**

Despite the efforts of the European Commission and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, healthcare workers remain at risk. A significant disparity is beginning to grow with regard to the protection of healthcare workers across the EU. Therefore we urge

the EU to invest in a combination of training, safer working practices and the use of medical devices incorporating needlestick protection technology in order to prevent many of these potentially fatal injuries. We call on the EU Institutions to communicate clear policy and requirements to Member States in view of ensuring consistent compliance with existing EU Worker Safety and Health Directives among EU healthcare providers, and in particular:

- **Use of ‘Sharps Protection’ Technology, such as safer needle devices and sharps containers at the point of use**, especially for high-risk medical procedures.
- **Safer working practices**, including the elimination of unnecessary injections and sharps, use of immunization against hepatitis B, protective clothing, safe disposal, and effective response in case of injury including post-exposure prophylaxis
- **Better information and education** of healthcare workers on the risks of exposure, prevention methods and effective incident reporting

The medical technology solutions available in Europe today, to help protect healthcare workers include:

- Needles that are blunted, sheathed or retracted after use. Needle-free systems for certain applications.
- Medical devices with shielded cutting blades.

## Statement Sponsors



*The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) was established in 1971. EFN represents over one million nurses and is the independent voice of the profession. Members consist of national nurses' associations from the twenty-five EU Member States. Associate Members are drawn from nursing associations in countries which are members of the Council of Europe. The mission of EFN is to safeguard the status and practice of the profession of nursing and the interests of nurses in the EU and Europe*

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*The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is a federation of 125 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. ICN is the international voice of nursing and works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally*

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