Practice Matters

Preventing injuries from disposable syringes

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• Lessons learned from EPINet

Editor's note: This article is the last in a three-part series brought to you in partnership with the International Safety Center. The earlier articles ("Preventing needlestick and sharps injuries" and "Preventing blood and body fluid splashes and splatters") are available at americannursetoday.com/preventing-needlestick-sharpsinjuries and americannursetoday.com/blood-bodyfluid-splashes.

A TOOL that surveys and measures occupational exposures to blood and body fluids, the Exposure Pre-

vention Information Network (EPINet[®]) helps identify where infectious exposures are occurring in U.S. hospitals and lets you compare them with what's happening in your facility. The International Safety Center distributes EPINet for free to hospitals and healthcare facilities to measure exposures that can cause illness and infection in the working population.

Most prevalent injuries

The first article in this series focused on needlestick and sharps injuries. This article takes another look at these injuries because they're the most prevalent type of occupational exposure to blood and body fluids. Of all injuries collected by EPINet aggregate hospitals in the 5-year period from 2009 to 2013, 50.6% stemmed from devices used to inject a fluid into the skin and 53% stemmed from disposable syringes.



Protecting yourself and others

Now that you know the facts, you can take steps to help eliminate injuries from disposable syringes and encourage your employer to take action.

Consider:

Nearly 85% of injuries from disposable syringes result from use of devices with a safety mechanism, but 62.2% of those injuries occurred when the safety feature wasn't activated. Consider: While almost 90% of injuries occurred in nurses using disposable syringes, 10.6% occurred to someone nearby who wasn't the original device user.

Take action:

Activate safety mechanisms on syringes immediately after use. Know if the needle retracts, slides, or snaps.

Take action:

Consider: Injuries can happen when devices are left where they shouldn't be.

Be mindful of those around you when giving an injection. Let others know you're performing an injection. Activate the safety feature and dispose of the device immediately in a sharps container.

Consider: Nurses are injuring themselves while manually elevating or pinching the patient's skin for insulin and other subcutaneous injections.

Take action:

Ditch the pinch. Determine if the needle is the proper length for the injection so you don't put your other hand at risk and alter your technique.

> *Consider:* Surprisingly, injuries still occur when safety syringes are used, either during or after the mechanism has been activated.

Take action:

After giving an injection, activate the safety feature and immediately place the syringe in a sharps container. If a sharps container isn't within reach, inform your manager of the need to evaluate for better placement. If a sharps container is overfilled, let the manager know immediately, as sharps protruding from a container can cause injuries.

Take action:

If you don't know how to use a device, ask for training. If the device isn't easy or intuitive to use, inform your employer that you want to participate in device evaluation so the devices that best meet your own and your patients' needs are chosen.

Innovation

Nurses are creative, resourceful innovators. You can directly and positively affect your own life and the lives of your patients and colleagues. If you don't consider yourself an innovator, look to those you think are. Use such resources as "Nurses leading through innovation" at http://goo.gl/MS03fj.

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