



The Nursing Week

Trusts in breach of sharps rules

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A third of hospital trusts in England are failing to comply with safety regulations designed to reduce the risk of needlestick injuries to nurses and other frontline staff, according to latest research.

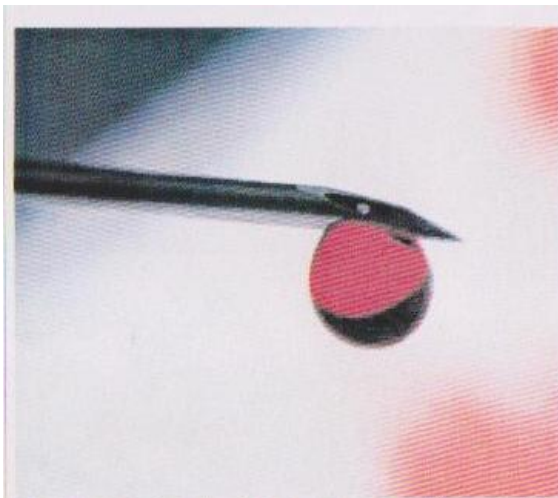
Analysts found 33% of trusts did not instruct staff to use safety devices "wherever possible" in their sharps policies, despite it being a requirement of health and safety regulations introduced last year on the back of a European Union directive.

A report by business analysts MindMetre looked into the implementation of Directive 2010/32/EU, which came into force in May 2010, and was followed by guidance from the Health and Safety Executive. Using the Freedom of Information Act, analysts obtained safety policy details from 159 hospital trusts.

Their report said: "The emerging picture is one of widespread progress towards adoption and compliance, but also one which shows that there is considerable ground yet to be covered."

It noted that most trusts are "demonstrating their concern of staff safety with tangible action" - 84% of trusts had revised their sharps policy in light of the directive. However, it said this still left a "remnant" of 16% of trusts - more than one in 10 - that had no plans in place to revise their sharps policy in light of the new regulations.

It said some had claimed their existing policies needed no revision, while others had simply said none was planned.



Hospital trusts have contravened EU regulations on safe sharps usage

having the greatest potential for deep injuries.

The report stated: "Around one sixth [of trusts] have not revised their sharps policies. Moreover one third... are not encouraging their staff to use safety devices 'wherever possible', despite this being a clear piece of guidance in the relevant regulation."

The analysts said they would “track further progress” later this year and are considering looking into sharps policies in the private sector and community settings, where “anecdotal evidence suggests that the focus is not as strong”.

Implementation of the directive brought to a close a legislative process dating back to 2005. As well as safer sharps, it requires employers to prevent recapping needles, train staff in the correct use and disposal of sharps and provide information to them on needlestick injuries. It applies to NHS, private and voluntary sector employers and staff, including contractors, but does not cover residential care homes, prisons or schools.

Sharps injuries account for 17% of NHS staff injuries and at least 17 healthcare workers were infected with hepatitis C as a result of a sharps injury between 1996 and 2009.