



Third of hospital trusts 'failing to comply' with sharps regulations



A third of hospital trusts in England are failing to comply with the recently-introduced sharps regulations designed to cut needlestick injuries to healthcare staff, according to a new study.

Researchers found 33% of acute healthcare trusts do not instruct staff through their sharps policies to use safer devices if possible, relying instead on the judgment of employees.

This is despite the regulations stating that when medical sharps are used at work, safer sharps should be used wherever possible.

Businesses analysts MindMetre carried out a series of Freedom of Information requests, finding 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."

The Health and Safety (Sharps Instruments in Healthcare) Regulations 2013, which came into force in May 2013, are designed to cut the incidence of blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis B, C, and HIV through the provision of "safer" sharp instruments. It implements the EU Council Directive 2010/32/EU.

Safer medical sharps should incorporate features to prevent or minimise the risk of accidental injury, such as syringes with a sliding shield to cover the needle after use.

MindMetre found that almost one fifth of trusts had revised their sharps policy in the light of the EU directive, before the the UK regulations came into effect. The report calls these trust "pioneers".

The report found of the 159 acute trusts in England, 84% have revised and published their sharps policy since the directive was published in 2010. But this leaves 16% who have no plans in place to revise their sharps policy in the light of the new regulations.

"Some claimed that their existing policies required no revision, and others simply stated that no revision was planned," the report states. "Given that sharps policy revisions have been deemed necessary by the majority of trusts, including the significant minority of pioneering institutions, it does not seem credible that any trust should require no policy revisions at all.

"Scrutiny from the regulatory authorities, which is already active, will, hopefully, decide the matter."