



By Susan Main

Safe injections

Exposure-control planning and safety-engineered needles reduce the risk of needle-stick injuries at Little Mountain Place intermediate care home.

Registered nurse Sukie Shoker says she felt disbelief when she looked down and saw a syringe sticking out of her thigh. She had just given a vitamin injection to a resident of Little Mountain Place, an intermediate care home in Vancouver, and was withdrawing the needle when someone walked up behind her medications cart and distracted her.

“It took my attention away from what I was doing. I was turning to talk to them and, at the same time, my hand opened up. The next thing I knew, I felt a sharp jab in my thigh,” Shoker says.

She knew it was critical to get to the emergency room within two hours of the needle stick, so she could be tested and, if necessary, receive anti-viral medication. She reported the incident to her employer, but received no instructions on what to do.

Severely stressed, Shoker drove herself to the hospital – something hospital staff later told her she should not have done in her distracted state.

“I was absolutely in shock and trying to get there on autopilot. It was just so unreal,” she says. “There wasn’t any instruction given to me [at her workplace]



Little Mountain Place has adopted self-sheathing needles, shown at left, to protect workers from needle-stick injuries. Safety-engineered needles and medical sharps will be required under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation effective January 1, 2008.

in terms of what to do, and it's not something you should have to figure out for yourself. When it happens to you, you can't think straight."

Because Little Mountain Place had no protocol for needle-stick injuries, Shoker arrived at the hospital without the required paperwork, including medical information on the resident whose blood she was exposed to. Hospital staff had to phone the care home for the information.

New direction

Two years after Shoker's needle-stick experience, a lot has changed for the better at the 117-bed facility.

When Barb Warner became director of care at Little Mountain Place in January 2006, she began reviewing its existing policies and practices. She then worked with the home's occupational health and safety committee to identify exposure risks and draft a new plan for the facility which was then reviewed by WorkSafeBC.

Little Mountain Place now has an established exposure-control plan and staff members use self-sheathing needles which protect workers from accidental needle sticks following an injection. Effective January 1, 2008, safety-engineered needles and medical sharps will be required in all workplaces where workers give injections, as required by a recent amendment to the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (section 6.36).

"It's been a big learning curve for a lot of people," says Warner, who's been a nurse since 1973 and a manager for the past 20 years. "Now we're looking at everybody in the building – their exposure to absolutely anything. It's not just nurses or care aides; it could be anyone who works in the facility."

A culture of caring

Warner says that, as a senior manager, it's important for her to show support for the new safety initiatives.

"It gives everyone a sense of reassurance that if there is a problem, they can bring it forward and it will get dealt with and they'll get a response. There is a real openness and people are feeling that they can approach the committee," she says. "If I can't support my staff doing their job safely, I'm not doing my job."

Shoker, who's also a member of the joint health and safety committee, says she and her co-workers support Little Mountain Place's new exposure plan and the amendments to the Regulation.

"It shows that the employer does care, that WorkSafeBC does care, and that we're not sacrificing our health for the residents and the work we do. It shows we are valued," she says. "If you're a nurse, you've got plenty of other responsibilities and the last thing you want to be worried about is that you're in an environment where the equipment is not up to a standard that's going to keep you safe."

Continued on next page

Heart Attacks Don't Have To Be Fatal

Is your office or workspace prepared?

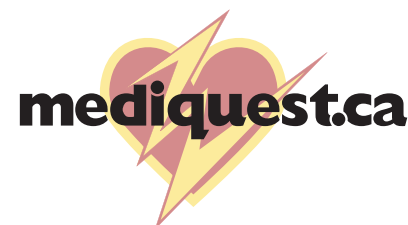
Would you know what to do?

We can help.



contact us online at
aed@mediquest.ca
or call us toll free at
1-866-831-3227

Call or email for a no-cost
workplace demonstration today!

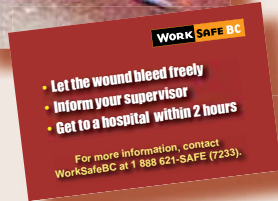


Exposure-control resources

Stuck by a needle?

If the answer is yes, a new WorkSafeBC poster offers clear and succinct instructions, and includes space for the address of the hospital nearest the workplace.


The poster is available as a download from WorkSafeBC.com: click on the Safety at Work tab, select Health Care from the Industries list, and then select Needlestick Injuries to link to the poster as well as other resources.



HIV/AIDS, and hepatitis B and C

Employers and workers in settings where contact with blood and body fluids is not expected to occur may still want to be prepared. This 44-page booklet provides information on diseases that can be contracted by exposure to blood and bodily fluids, tips on identifying and reducing risks, and examples of safe work practices.

The booklet is available as a download from WorkSafeBC.com: click on the Publications tab, select the publications index, and look under "H" for *HIV/AIDS, and hepatitis B and C*.

Printed copies of this publication can be purchased for a nominal fee from WorkSafeBCstore.com (see page 31 for ordering information). 

		the <i>Quality</i> you want		
				the <i>Pricing</i> you need
the <i>Service</i> you demand	<p>Saving Lives by Helping People Manage Risks</p> <p>Health & Safety Programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint Health & Safety Committee - Supervisor Training - Site Safety Officer - Construction Safety Officer - WHMIS - Transportation of Dangerous Goods - Forklift Operator Certification - Fall Protection - and more! 			
				<p>BC Safety Council 2225 - 21331 Gordon Way Richmond, BC Call Toll Free: 1-800-420-7730 www.safetycouncil.bc.ca bcsc@safetycouncil.bc.ca</p>