

Understanding Sharps Injuries in home health care: The Safe Home Project qualitative methods study to identify pathways for injury prevention

Markkanen et al, BMC Public Health (2015)

This research paper presents what could be thought of as the complete “ecosystem” of sharp medical devices (called “sharps”) in the home care environment; including sources of sharps, the sharps hazards present and options to reduce the need for sharps in the home. The study involved personal interviews with 26 experts including clinicians, public health officers, home healthcare agency representatives, educators and manufacturers of sharps. The results also include helpful color illustrations of the sharps home healthcare pathway.

Employers and other Stakeholders

What is the relevance of the research findings?

The results of the study are relevant to home healthcare work because:

- The introduction of sharps creates the first step in a chain of events that may eventually lead to a sharps injury
- A sharps injury always carries the risk of exposure to bloodborne pathogens in the person sustaining the injury

Intervention Opportunities –

Key points of intervention to reduce sharps injuries include:

- As much as possible, eliminating sharps use through alternative means of drug administration
- Use of sharps with injury prevention features
- Proper disposal of sharps
- Continuous education on safe practices associated with sharps use in the home
- Use of protective, puncture-resistant gloves/clothing when sharps are used

Home Care Aides and their Advocates

This research can help home care aides and their advocates to understand how sharps get into a client’s home and ways in which the use of sharps may put aides at risk of injury. The paper contains some very helpful color illustrations of the sharps pathway into and out of a homecare environment.

Knowing whether there are sharps present in a client’s home as well as understanding the process by which sharps enter and are disposed are important to reduce the risk of a sharps injury.