

Occupational health of home care aides: Results of the Safe Home Care Survey

Quinn et al, Occupational and Environmental Medicine (2016)

This research paper describes a survey that was conducted to help understand a wide range of occupational safety and health conditions among home care aides. The number of home care aides responding to the survey questionnaire was 1,249. The survey was conducted in Massachusetts from September 2012 to April 2013.

Employers and other Stakeholders

What is the relevance of the research findings?

The majority of home care aides reported being satisfied with their work and enjoy the relationships they have with their clients.

Home care aides experience similar types of occupational hazards to those experienced by aides in institutional healthcare settings such as hospitals and long-term care facilities.

The safety and health hazards reported by home care aides in this study include:

- Unassisted patient handling with the associated risk of musculoskeletal injury
- Slip, trip and fall hazards
- Potential presence of infectious agents in body fluids and waste
- Presence of sharp medical devices in the client home
 - Client-hired aides reported greater exposure to sharp medical devices than agency-employed aides
- Exposure to strong cleaning and disinfection chemicals, such as bleach and ammonia
- Threatening behavior by client, especially when the client had a diagnosis of dementia

Intervention Opportunities

Employers can reduce the safety and health risks associated with exposure to occupational hazards through hazard recognition and control training - for example at orientation or in-service training opportunities. In addition, employers and their referral networks can screen clients' homes at in-take and during regular assessments for the presence of hazards and determine best ways to manage them. Employers can also support home care aides with an effective "lone worker program" to provide continuity of contact in the event of an emergency.

Home Care Aides and their Advocates

Although home care aides may enjoy their work, they may still encounter safety and health hazards in clients' homes.

Some steps that home care aides can take to protect themselves from hazards identified by this study include:

- Use safe client transfer and handling techniques and know the limits for client handling
- Identify and when possible remove slip, trip and fall hazards when arriving at the client's home
- Use universal precautions to protect from exposure to potential infectious agents in body fluids or waste
- Find out how sharp medical devices are disposed in the home If the client uses them
- Do not assist clients with using sharps unless qualified by proper training
- Read and follow safety warnings on cleaning and disinfection product labels
- Open windows or use a ventilation fan to remove vapors from cleaning and disinfection products
- Move away from the client if the client becomes violent or abusive. Then contact the employer and follow the procedure the employer has in place