

Ensuring safe sharps management



By
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Sharps and needlestick injuries continue to be a primary occupational hazard for healthcare workers around the world. In fact, recent research suggests that healthcare workers suffer from over two million needlestick injuries per year, with the prevalence of injuries being highest among dentists.¹

As such, it's important for dental professionals to keep on top of sharps safety as well as making sure that everyone in the team understands the waste management protocols for these items and why it is necessary to follow these guidelines.

The dangers of needlestick injuries

The latest data from 2019 surrounding needlestick injuries in dentistry reveals that over 50% of dental professionals and students of the profession had suffered at least one serious needlestick injury in the previous 12-month period.² This is interesting research as it not only proves how prevalent these injuries are, but that they also impact individuals at all levels of the dentistry profession.

The biggest concern surrounding needlestick injuries is that they can lead to transmission of some potentially life-changing illnesses. Bloodborne diseases such



as Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV can all be transmitted via needlestick injury. Further uncommon conditions in the UK such as the Ebola virus can also be spread in this manner.³

While these conditions are curable or manageable in the modern day, there is still the potential for considerable emotional distress when someone finds out they have contracted one of these conditions, especially HIV which currently has no cure. There's also the need to take into account that people who have contracted one of these diseases may not be immediately aware that they are carrying it. As such, it is absolutely essential that whenever professionals do suffer from a needlestick injury, especially when treating someone who they are aware is carrying or may be classed as a high-risk individual for one of these diseases, they seek medical attention in order to prevent further transmission.

When it comes to minimising sharps injuries occurring, the best guidance is to ensure that you know where sharps items are at all times and to not leave them unattended. Sheathing syringes is another effective way to help prevent accidental injury. It is also good guidance to not break or snap needles before disposal, as attempting to do so can considerably raise the chances of incurring an injury.

Safely disposing of sharps waste

Sharps waste must be disposed of correctly in order to further lower the chance of needlestick injuries, and by proxy, the potential transmission of bloodborne diseases. If contaminated sharps were to end up in general waste, there's every possibility that they could come into contact with someone

and cause injury, especially if the person handling the waste is not expecting there to be sharps in the container.

Depending on what the needle has been used for, sharps waste can be categorised under different colours in the Department of Health's colour coded guide for best practice

for all applicable coloured waste streams, and also has extra products to promote sharps safety for dental professionals such as the InSafe Sharps Safety System – an innovative device that has been developed to eliminate the chance of needlestick injuries during administration.

'Emphasising sharps safety is paramount in order to keep yourself and your colleagues safe. By focusing on safe use and correct disposal, you can help ensure that injuries are rare'

waste disposal (<https://www.initial.co.uk/colour-coding-guide/>). For example, needles used to supply botulinum toxin injections are typically classed as purple waste (Cytostatic/Cytotoxic), while those used to administer anaesthetic would be classed as yellow waste (Clinical Highly Infectious). It's necessary to ensure your team is aware of these different waste streams and how sharps waste may be categorised differently, so they can always dispose of sharps in the correct manner.

The use of sharps in healthcare settings has increased drastically throughout the last year. At the time of writing, over half of the UK population has received at least one dose of Coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination, meaning that sharps waste is at an all-time high.⁴ While this is unlikely to impact the level of sharps waste being produced in dental practices, it does have a potential impact on the waste management services you use.

It is important that you make sure that the service provider you use can cope with the increased demand and can continue to provide your practice with efficient, safe waste disposal.

Initial Medical has ensured that it can meet the current demand and offers dental practices a bespoke sharps disposal service, meaning that you can guarantee that you are always disposing of sharps in a safe and compliant manner. Initial Medical supplies a vast array of sharps containers in all sizes

Keeping safe around sharps

Emphasising sharps safety is paramount in order to keep yourself and your colleagues safe. By focusing on safe use and correct sharps disposal, you can help ensure that sharps injuries are a rare occurrence in your practice.

For further information visit www.initial.co.uk/medical or call 0870 850 4045.

References

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