

Care Workers

For many women, like cleaning, care work is a double job - caring responsibilities at home for children, disabled or elderly relatives added to the paid work as a carer.

Musculoskeletal disorders (for example back pain/injury) are one of the main reasons why people are off sick from work.

Care workers work in hospitals, nursing homes, and in people's own homes. Regardless of the workplace the jobs all have one thing in common - heavy physical work involving a great deal of lifting. The HSE* says that, whilst the Manual Handling Operations Regulations do not require a "no lifting" policy, *there needs to be a balanced approach to ensure that care workers are not required to perform tasks that put them and clients at risk unreasonably.*

For many years the NHS was covered by crown immunity, which broadly meant that they did not have to comply with health and safety legislation. This is no longer the case, but many health care settings are still stuck in the old ways. An example is the case of *Hardman v Mallon (2002)* brought by a care worker who was pregnant. The employer had not done risk assessments for any of workers - women and men - in a care home. The Employment Appeal Tribunal found the employer guilty of sex discrimination.

Many care workers work for agencies and are sent in to workplaces or people's own homes. In this situation the agency will normally have some responsibility for health and safety - as well as the host employer - for both the care worker and the people being cared for. The agency and host employer should co-operate to ensure health and safety standards are met.

See next page for **Hazards to Care Workers** and **Action Checklist**

Some Relevant Law

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

The Workplace (Health Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002

Some Further information

T & G leaflet Do you suffer from aches and pains in silence?

HSE booklet Handling Home Care HSG 225 £9.50

HSE booklet Health and Safety in Care Homes HSG220 £8.50

HSE leaflet Violence at Work - a guide for employers INDG 69L- free

HSE leaflet Blood Borne Viruses in the Workplace INDG - free

HSE leaflet Latex and You INDG 320 - free

HSE leaflet Back in Work. INDG333 – free

HSE leaflet Glutaraldehyde and YOU IAC64(rev1) - free

HSE leaflet Controlling Legionella in nursing and residential care homes INDG253 – free

Hazards to Care Workers

- Lifting and handling patients can lead to back and other musculoskeletal injuries.
 - Contact with blood, body fluids and contaminated needles presents a risk of infections such as TB, HIV, and Hepatitis .
 - Disinfectants such as Gluteraldehyde and Formaldehyde can cause health problems such as occupational asthma.
 - Latex gloves can cause skin reactions and Occupational asthma
 - Some anaesthetic gases can cause reproductive harm and miscarriages
 - Radiation from X-rays can cause reproductive harm and cancer.
 - Certain Cancer Treatment drugs can cause reproductive harm
 - Stress from long working hours and dealing with seriously ill and dying patients.
 - Violent and aggressive patients and relatives
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Action Checklist

1. Have Risk assessments been carried out?
2. Have COSHH assessments been carried out and include biohazards (e.g. HIV, Hepatitis B etc.)?
3. Are latex gloves substituted for safer alternatives?
4. Are pregnant workers protected from exposure to dangerous anaesthetic gases and cancer treatments?
5. Have Manual Handling risk assessments been carried out? Are all workers trained in safe handling techniques?
6. What procedures are in place to prevent assaults to workers?
7. Is there a Stress policy?
8. What support systems are in place for staff following traumatic incidents such as attacks and deaths?

Pregnancy Hazards:

Biohazards (especially German Measles), anaesthetic gases, mercury, formaldehyde, radiation, heavy repetitive work, lifting, stress, prolonged standing, cancer treatment drugs, long working hours, shiftwork and violence.

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