

15/09/2004 - On the eve of the HIV/AIDS conference in Vilnius - Health First Europe demands more action from the EU to protect healthcare workers from sharps' injuries!

It is estimated that 1 million needlestick injuries are suffered by healthcare workers across the European Union each year. More than 20 dangerous blood-borne pathogens are transmitted by contaminated needles including Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and of course HIV. These injuries are preventable!

Independent studies show that solutions are available today which can prevent more than 80% of needlestick injuries through a combination of training, safer working practices and the use of medical devices incorporating needlestick protection technology.

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work has already made a number of key recommendations:

- Eliminate the use of needles where safety and effective alternatives are available.
- Implement the use of devices with safety features and evaluate their use to determine which are most effective and acceptable.
- Modify work practices that pose a needle injury hazard to make them safer. Avoid recapping needles.
- Train workers in the safe use and disposal of needles in appropriate sharps containers.

A small number of Member States are tackling this issue, but many are not, which indicates to Health First Europe these recommendations are not being implemented, or are not even being considered, by the majority of healthcare providers across the EU.

Registered Nurse, Karen Daley was drawing blood from an elderly patient with mild dementia. She turned to dispose of the butterfly needle into the sharps container, when she felt a stinging pain and realised that she had been struck on her the index finger by another needle had become wedged in the container's hinged opening.

After taking both the HIV and HCV tests Karen discovered that she had tested positive for both viruses. "I can't describe to you how drastically one moment – the moment of my needlestick – has changed my life. Since January, I have had to come to terms with the fact that I am infected with not one, but two potentially life-threatening viruses."

"Stories like Karen's are all too common", says Bert Van Caelenberg, Secretary General of Eurofedop, and Health First Europe member. "Action must be taken now to reduce the risks of sharp's injuries to healthcare workers across the EU."

On the eve of the European Union's 2nd Open Europe Conference entitled "Europe and HIV / AIDS: New Challenges, New Opportunities", Health First Europe calls on those present to do more to prevent sharps' injuries and to reduce the number of stories like Karen's. Any Action Plan emanating from the conference must give due consideration and provide for action for this to this often forgotten category of Europeans at great risk from HIV infection.

On World AIDS' day, December 1st 2004, Health First Europe will be holding an event in the European Parliament to in an attempt further raise awareness amongst decision makers and the public about the risks' of sharps' injuries to healthcare workers and what can be done to tackle this problem.

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Notes to Editors:

Health First Europe is an alliance of patients, healthcare workers, academics, experts and industry, which aims to ensure that equitable access to modern, innovative and reliable medical technology and healthcare is regarded as a vital investment in the future of Europe.

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work recommendations can be found in FACTS Issues 29 Safety and Health Good Practice on-line for the Healthcare Sector ISSN 1681-2123.

Extract from 'Demanding Safety'; Karen Daley, R.N., M.P.H., Advances in Exposure Prevention – Vol. 4, No.4.

Bert Van Caelenberg is the Secretary General of Eurofedop, the European Federation of Public Service Employees. Eurofedop is a member of Health First Europe.