

BULLETIN

Addressing a 91% injury rate for ultrasound technologists

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Ten years ago, a survey of BC ultrasound technologists found 91% of them had suffered work-related injuries at some point in their careers. Medical literature still says 80% of sonographers seek medical treatment for musculoskeletal injuries, 17% miss work due to the symptoms of their injuries, and 15% reduce their duties to recover.

The Health Sciences Association of BC teamed up with WorkSafeBC to investigate how to prevent these injuries and develop a range of solutions.

A ground-breaking partnership to seek solutions

HSA President Reid Johnson said the joint project was a ground-breaking partnership. "We hired certified professional ergonomist Judy Village to work with hospital staff in ultrasound departments to identify the types of scans posing the highest risk of injury, as well as equipment and practices that increase the risk of pain and injury," he said.

The project resulted in a comprehensive review of "best practices" for hospital ultrasound technologists. These recommended ergonomic practices have been summarized into clearly-illustrated resource sheets that can be [downloaded from HSA's website](#) or at www.hsabc.org > Resources > Health and Safety. The material is also available for download [from the WorkSafeBC website](#).

Ultrasound techs: highly skilled, high-demand

"Hospital sonographers are highly-trained and a crucial part of the modern health care team," Johnson said.

"Ultrasound isn't just used for scanning your fetus during pregnancy," he said. "Ultrasound is used to help diagnose cancer, cardiovascular disease, and many, many other soft-tissue medical conditions. It's highly effective as well as relatively non-intrusive -- which means doctors have increasingly come to rely on ultrasound technologists and their skills," he said.

However, BC hospitals are experiencing a shortage of diagnostic imaging staff. "This shortage is particularly acute in the Interior and in the North," Johnson said. "Because of their dedication to patients, ultrasound staff are working long overtime hours. This is partly an effort to forestall any further wait lists, for example.

"However, this kind of workload overload can also contribute to workplace injuries for sonographers, further aggravating the staff shortage. You can bet this has an impact on patient care," he said. "These tools were developed so that sonographers across BC have access to resources that help them stay healthy and on the job to provide the patient care British Columbians need."

Thanks to ultrasound department staff

Johnson thanked the ultrasound department staff at St. Josephs Hospital in Comox and at Nanaimo Regional General Hospital for participating in the study. "Without their participation and technical expertise, the

ergonomics team could not have identified the best practices," he said. -I sincerely thank them for their dedication and assistance."

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