

BULLETIN

Safety training for new and young workers now just a click away

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onique had never had a serious injury before. Shed put herself through college by working as a food server, and although shed often ended up with sore feet and an ache in her lower back, shed been told that sort of thing was just part of the job. So when she threw her back out lifting a patient in her third week at her job at a residential care facility, it took her by surprise.

The missed work, the pain and limited mobility, and the demands of ongoing physiotherapy were even more unexpected.

To anyone familiar with the statistics on new and young worker injuries, however, Moniques story is not surprising at all. In all fields, not just health care, new and young workers are a much higher risk of injury than workers of other ages. According to WCB/WorkSafeBC:

- Each working day in BC, 46 young workers are hurt on the job;
- Three of these workers are permanently injured every week;
- Almost 20 per cent of serious injuries and fatalities involving young workers occur in the first month on the job.
- Young workers average 3.5 time loss WCB/ WorkSafeBC claims per 100 full-time equivalents, compared to 3.1 claims for the entire workforce.

The message for anyone concerned with occupational health and safety is crystal clear: young and new workers have specific needs that must be addressed.

With this goal in mind, The Occupational Health and Safety Agency for Healthcare (OHSAH), a provincial agency made up of unions and employers, in collaboration with various stakeholders including HSA, has created an online OH&S module to orient and train new and young health care workers.

The module is an online educational tool accessible via the OHSAH website for no charge. Its interactive format, vibrant graphics and practical approach are specifically designed to be interesting and educational for new and young workers in the healthcare sector.

As well as educating workers about the types of hazards they can face at the workplace, and of ways to eliminate or reduce these hazards, the module trains workers to be aware of the their health and safety rights and responsibilities, and of their employers legal responsibilities in this area.

The category "new and young workers" includes experienced health care professionals who are new to a particular job site, who have come from another country and culture, as well as young (under 25) people who have never worked before.

Marty Lovick, HSA Safety Officer, was a member of the working group that created the module. He says a convergence of factors led to its creation. "It was serendipity. Several things happened at the same time," says Lovick. In July, 2007, Work-SafeBC implemented new regulations requiring employers to orient and train new and young workers in workplace hazards before they face the hazard.

Safety training module for new and young health care workers
<http://kat.ohsah.bc.ca/lms>

"So training expectations have gotten stronger," says Lovick. "As well, we're seeing more and more healthcare happening, with new people coming in needing training. The figures in healthcare remain high for musculoskeletal injuries. So [we said] let's make a resource that can help," says Lovick.

"OHSAH was a natural choice to do this project because of its role as a clearinghouse on best practices and its ability to take on a leading role on offering training modules and research initiatives for the benefit of healthcare in the province.

"We set out to put together a generic module by asking ourselves, what would an employer want to do, when someone new walks in the door, to meet WCB expectations about safety?"

Sometimes employers see these kinds of requirements as a hindrance, says Lovick. "But they have to understand that there is a law saying they have to do something. And if you give them a way to do it that is fairly painless, it helps the employers see that it actually is in their best interests. It's a win-win situation.

"The module can assist smaller employers who don't have a program, and also can be integrated into an already existing OH&S orientation program at larger organizations," says Lovick.

The on-line format makes the module cost-effective and easily accessible. However, the module shouldn't be seen as a replacement for face-to-face communication, says Lovick. Site-specific and hazard-specific training are essential.

The module and its contents are relevant to all HSA members, not just young and new workers, says Lovick. "All workers are at risk when a new worker doesn't know what they are doing. Clients and patients are safer when staff are safer." The module can take pressure off experienced workers who may wonder when, and how, to step in when they see a new colleague engaging in unsafe practices.

With the new OHSAH module, workplace injury prevention is now just a click away, providing an easy way to change stories such as Monique's:

"So when Monique started work at a residential care facility, she was happy to receive training in occupational health and safety. She learned not just how to prevent injuries and illness on the job, but also what her rights and responsibilities were in this area." A less dramatic story, perhaps, but much more satisfying!

If you have a safety concern at your workplace, talk to your occupational health and safety steward, or contact Marty Lovick at the HSA office. 

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