



Action on cardiac sonographer injuries

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Diagnostic Medical Sonographers - workers who specialize in the use of imaging devices to produce diagnostic images, scans and videos - have always been at risk for developing work-related musculoskeletal disorders.

Those injuries include tendonitis, bursitis and muscle and nerve damage to hands, arms, elbows, shoulders, necks and backs.

HSA stewards in Victoria last summer raised concerns that injuries among sonographers working in the Echocardiology Labs at the Royal Jubilee and Victoria General Hospitals were on the rise - even when compared to the already high injury rates experienced in sonography occupations generally. As a result, a plan was put in place to consult with those members, gather evidence and bring recommendations for action forward to the employer.

Through a survey and follow up meetings with members, the union found that almost all sonographers in the Echo Labs at RJH and VGH were working in pain, 85% had sought medical attention recently and 75% felt they had not received adequate ergonomic training. Most identified a need to build better rest, recovery and exercise time into their schedules, but said that due to increasing volume and complexity of cardiac scans, there wasn't enough time available to engage in those injury prevention measures.

HSA proposed the formation of a union-employer working group to gather evidence related to injuries and ergonomic best practices and to facilitate changes in the RJH and VGH Echo Labs to reduce sonographer injuries. Island Health and Echocardiology management agreed to the working group, which includes four HSA representatives. They are meeting monthly and are working on a new Ergonomics Policy document and recommendations for injury identification and reduction.

HSA Safety Steward Carol Petersen, co-chair of the Echo Lab Working Group, describes the project this way: "I've witnessed cardiac sonographers developing permanent disabilities simply by doing their jobs. I feel a strong desire to have these highly trained (and in very short supply) professionals not get injured at work. The evolving and increasingly technical demands of their work is directly related to their injuries. It's important for the union to be proactive in finding ways to reduce these injuries. With the direct involvement of members in this project, we hope to benefit sonographers not just at this site, but province wide.

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