

Fear of Deportation Makes Many Nurses Hide Infectious Diseases

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DUBAI - Healthcare workers who are likely to have contracted HIV or Hepatitis B from hospital needles and scalpels are often not reporting the injuries for fear of losing their jobs.

A survey of 1,420 nurses and doctors in Dubai and Sharjah revealed that one in five was injured by sharp objects and 55 per cent of those injuries were from contaminated objects.

However, under-reporting was six fold in a study group of 752 workers and non-existent in a further study group of 668 workers.

"People are often scared of reporting these injuries because they could be socially excluded or isolated," said Dr Ana Jacob, Specialist Physician at Welcare Hospital in Dubai.

"Especially in the UAE, they could lose their jobs if they are found with these diseases."

"There is a three-month incubation period from the point of injury until the disease becomes apparent," said Jacob. "There is a high degree of anxiety during this period for healthcare workers."

The study has not been published but findings were revealed at the International Risk Management Conference on Tuesday.

It is the first of its kind in the UAE and fills a gap in World Health Organisation statistics.

Bins overflowing with hypodermic needles can cause accidental injury and over half of the injuries reported in the survey were from objects which had been inadequately disposed of.

Immediately after injury, the healthcare worker should be given medication to be taken an hour after the injury to prevent contraction of HIV.

While this is available in the government hospitals, private hospitals do not similarly protect staff. Jacob said the same protection should be offered at private hospitals.

Moreover, she added that where such treatment was available, it was important that nurses be able to report injuries anonymously rather than having to put their careers on the line.

The two healthcare organisations surveyed in Jacob's report had previously made employees pay for their own Hepatitis B vaccinations soon after joining the company.

This meant that many had opted out and were not protected against the disease. However, after hospital bosses were notified of the survey both organisations began to offer free vaccinations to new employees.

{ Khaleej Times }