

Safe Use of Sharps

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Introduction

1.1 Context

It is important to use the right equipment for each task that you carry out. Injury through improper use and storage of knives, blades and needles can lead to serious injuries being sustained.

1.2 Purpose

The aim of this policy to ensure that adequate attention is given to the management, storage and use of knives, needles and sharp objects within the pharmacy. This policy will outline the basic safety principles to help minimise the risk of injury to individuals.

1.3 Scope

This policy is applicable to all employees and managers within the company. This policy does not cover the procedures for carrying out functions such as flu vaccinations or needle exchange programmes. Please refer to the relevant SOP documents for guidance in these areas. The main points of this policy are included in the employee handbook.

Procedure

2.1 Definitions

Staff may use a range of different sharp items for a variety of tasks, for example

- Performing pharmaceutical services such as flu vaccinations or needle exchange programmes
- Cutting, opening of product boxes
- Cutting tablets or tablet strips
- Slicing and dicing of foods

It is important to use the correct equipment for the task involved.

2.2 Responsibilities

Management

- Management should ensure that all staff in contact with needles and sharp items have been adequately trained to the required standards and that all staff demonstrate the competences necessary for the task involved.
- Ensuring that appropriate risk assessments are conducted regularly.
- Responsibility for monitoring of stock of needles and sharp equipment. Stock should be monitored every 2 weeks.

Staff

- To ensure that any training provided with regards to safe use of sharps is conducted and that any queries or concerns are addressed with the Pharmacy Manager.
- To highlight areas of non compliance.
- To ensure that tasks utilising sharps, needles, blades or knives are conducted with regard for their own safety and the safety of those around them.
- To ensure policies and procedures as detailed and briefed by the company are adhered to.

2.3 Safe Usage of Knives

- Do not use a knife/blade unless you have to. Order supplies in easy-open containers if possible. Use tablet cutters for preparing medicines. Use scissors or retractable blade for opening bags/boxes.
- Cut away from you - Always cut away from you. Never cut towards yourself. Cut down onto a proper cutting board/surface.
- Safe use of Knives - Do not put knives in the sink. Do not leave knives soaking in a sink full of water -they are an invisible hazard. Provide a designated area for dirty knives and inform everyone.
- Never cut in your hand - Cut or chop on a board-never in your hand. Ensure a proper cutting surface is provided.
- Wash knives/blades safely - Hold the handle and use a brush when washing sharp objects. This is important when washing knives in the sink.
- Use the right knife - Use scissors, not blades, for cutting strips of tablets. Use tablet cutters for preparing medicines and not razor blades. Do not use a very large sharp knife unnecessarily e.g. when cutting food. Remove all knives that are not needed. Use safety-knives or retractable blades where possible and not unprotected razor blades.

2.4 Safe Storage of Knives

Sharp equipment left unattended on counters may be picked up by children or may be used as a weapon against staff causing serious harm. Therefore the safe storage of knives, blades and scissors must be given adequate attention to ensure the safety of employees and customers.

- Store knives/blades securely in the proper areas.
- Ensure proper storage is provided.
- Label storage area as required.
- Do not leave knives lying around in shelving, sink areas, on workbenches or till points.

2.5 Safe Storage of Needles/Sharps

- Must be in controlled areas/not in public view
- Any sharps/needles are stored securely within the pharmacy area
- Stock levels of sharps/needles are checked regularly
- An accountable person is responsible for the management of sharps/needle stocks

2.6 Safe Disposal of Sharps/Needles

- Protective gloves are provided when disposing of broken glass or sharp items
- All sharps/needles must be disposed in sharps bins provided by your maintenance helpdesk
- All sharps/needle bins must not be overfilled and must be stored in a secure area out of reach of public/children
- These bins are picked up when full through the maintenance helpdesk by hazardous waste company

2.7 Additional Support

Additional support for managers and employees is available through the following:

- Business Manager
- Health & Safety Coordinator
- Human Resources Department