



Health & Safety **MATTERS**

Health & Safety Information for GMB Safety Reps

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Health & Safety in Care Homes

Introduction

As the care sector in the UK undergoes more scrutiny amid the consequences of publicity from abuse scandal's the HSE, last year, published its' guidance for the sector in HSG 220- "Health & Safety in Care Homes". This is a comprehensive guide to health, safety and welfare issues for the workforce, while not forgetting the residents. Ideally every care home manager should look at this and use it as a guide for managing health and safety under their responsibility.

Why look at health & safety in care homes?

Care homes differ from most workplaces as they are not only a place of work but are also the home of the residents, who deserve to be treated with dignity. Managing the homes safely will be the responsibility of different agencies including the NHS, Local Authorities, the Voluntary sector and private owners. The guidance is therefore targeted at owners, managers and providers, and will also be useful to GMB safety reps.

Enforcement of regulations

Previously the main enforcers for health & safety across the UK were either the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or the Local Authority. However both have been the subject of "efficiency" cuts, the local authority inspections down by over 90% and the HSE only proactively enforce Agriculture, Construction and Waste sectors. In England since this April the sector will now be enforced by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), while in Scotland and Wales it will remain, for now, with the HSE.

What regulations apply?

The main regulations that are covered in care homes include:-

The Health & Safety at Work Act

The Management of Health & Safety at Work regulations

The Manual Handling regulations

The Provision and Use of Work Equipment regulations

Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment regulations

Electricity at Work regulations

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health regulations (COSHH)

Health & Safety (Sharps Instruments in Healthcare) regulations

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The Provision and use of Personal Protective Equipment regulations
Work at Heights regulations
Workplace (Health, Safety & Welfare) regulations
Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences regulations (RIDDOR)
The Working Time regulations

What specific areas are covered?

While it is one thing to list the various pieces of legislation that apply it is entirely appropriate to ask what things should a manager be looking for. Obviously much that is done properly will stem from the risk assessment process, if it has been carried out competently and involved the workforce and GMB reps. Some of the more obvious hazards to be aware of are slippery or uneven floors, use of lifting equipment, the correct use of personal protective equipment, Stress, Violence, working alone, needle sticks, chemicals, blood borne diseases, manual handling, hot water and hot surfaces and falls from heights, This list is not exhaustive and doesn't include specialist areas such as Legionella's disease.

Managing Safely

Understandably there is a fine balancing act between ensuring the safety of vulnerable residents and that of a large, often diverse workforce. The core elements of good management of health and safety are:

- Good leadership and management
- A trained, skilled and competent workforce
- Consultation with, and involvement of the workforce

The HSE recommends that health and safety management requires a sustained and systematic approach including-

Plan- say what needs to happen and how it will be achieved

Do-profile the risks, decide on preventive measures and ensure that there are safe systems and adequate equipment in place to do the job properly

Check- monitor the work to see if it is being done safely, and investigate the cause of accidents, incidents and near misses

Act- review the performance and take action on lessons learned, using audit and inspection reports.

Conclusion

While a care home may not be a typical type of workplace by following some basic health and safety management practices it does not have to be difficult. Unfortunately some surveys have shown a large lack of awareness on the existence of HSG 220, or indeed other good, practical guidance from the HSE- it can even be downloaded for FREE! Just go to www.hse.gov.uk and enter care homes. For further information on any health, safety or welfare issues please contact Daniel.shears@gmb.org.uk or john.mcclean@gmb.org.uk

General Secretary
Paul Kenny
GMB
22 Stephenson Way
London
NW1 2HD