

SHARPS INJURIES AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE, COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

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Abstract

Introduction: Medical students undertake clinical procedures which carry a risk of sharps injuries exposing them to blood-borne infections. **Objectives:** To study the prevalence and correlates of sharps injuries among 4th-year medical students in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. **Materials and Methods:** The survey was conducted among 4th-year medical students to find out the incidence of injuries during high-risk procedures, associated factors and practice and perceptions regarding standard precautions. A self-administered questionnaire was administered to a batch of 197 4th-year medical students. **Results:** A total of 168 medical students responded. One or more injury was experienced by 95% (N = 159) of the students. The majority (89%) occurred during suturing; 23% during venipuncture and 14% while assisting in deliveries. Most of the incidents (49%) occurred during Obstetrics and Gynecology attachments. Recapping needles led to 8.6% of the injuries. Thirty-five percent of students believed they were inadequately protected. In this group, adequate protection was not available in 21% of the incidences and 24% thought protection was not needed. Following the injury, 47% completely ignored the event and only 5.7% followed the accepted post-exposure management. Only 34% of the students knew about post-exposure management at the time of the incident. Only 15% stated that their knowledge regarding prevention and management was adequate. The majority (97%) believed that curriculum should put more emphasis on improving the knowledge and practice regarding sharps injuries. **Conclusions:** The incidence of sharps injuries was high in this setting. Safer methods of suturing should be taught and practiced. The practice of standard precautions and post-injury management should be taught.

Key words:

Sharps injury, Medical students occupational safety, Needle-stick injuries

INTRODUCTION

Health care workers (HCW) are constantly exposed to contaminated sharps instruments. This exposes them to various blood-borne infections (BBIs) including HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C and many other pathogens [1–3].

The estimated population prevalence of HIV/AIDS was less than 0.1% in Sri Lanka [4]. However, the current social structure in Sri Lanka and its proximity to India which has a large population with HIV/AIDS [5,6] places Sri Lanka at a highly vulnerable state for a large epidemic of HIV/AIDS [7]. In addition, there is paucity of data on

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