



Occupational Hazards in Home Healthcare

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An aging population and rising hospital costs have created new and increasing demand for innovative healthcare delivery systems in the United States. Home healthcare provides vital medical assistance to ill, elderly, convalescent, or disabled persons who live in their own homes instead of a healthcare facility, and is one of the most rapidly expanding industries in this country. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that home healthcare employment will grow 55% between 2006-2016, making it the fastest growing occupation of the next decade. Home healthcare workers facilitate the rapid and smooth transition of patients from a hospital to a home setting. They offer patients the unique opportunity to receive quality medical care in the comfort of their own homes rather than in a healthcare or nursing facility. Home healthcare workers, while contributing greatly to the well-being of others, face unique risks on the job to their own personal safety and health. During 2007 alone, 27,400 recorded injuries occurred among more than 896,800 home healthcare workers. Home healthcare workers are frequently exposed to a variety of potentially serious or even life-threatening hazards. These dangers include overexertion stress guns and other weapons illegal drugs verbal abuse and other forms of violence in the home or community bloodborne pathogens needlesticks latex sensitivity temperature extremes unhygienic conditions, including lack of water, unclean or hostile animals, and animal waste. Long commutes from worksite to worksite also expose the home healthcare worker to transportation-related risks. This document aims to raise awareness and increase understanding of the safety and health risks involved in home healthcare and suggests prevention strategies to reduce the number of injuries, illnesses, and fatalities that too frequently occur among workers in this industry.

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