Health and Safety Executive

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By email

28th March 2023

To: all NHS Trust and Board Chief Executives

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) - Recommendations for Managing Violence and Aggression and Musculoskeletal Disorders in the NHS

Please find attached HSE's summary findings on the management of risks from workplace violence and aggression (V&A) and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) in the NHS, following an inspection programme carried out between 2018 and 2022.

HSE is recommending that you consider the four main categories where management failings have been identified (Risk Assessment, Training, Roles and Responsibilities, and Monitoring and Review) and satisfy yourself that your Trust / Board is managing these areas in such a way as to comply with health and safety law.

This document is being circulated to all NHS Trusts and Boards in Great Britain via internal NHS EPRR channels. Copies of the recommendations are also being shared with relevant NHS employer and employee groups, employee representative groups and trade unions.

For HSE to be assured that suitable action has been taken, we will be undertaking further interventions with the NHS over the next 12 months. These interventions will follow a two-step approach as follows:

Step One: Several high-level interventions by appointment between NHS Trust Chief Executives and HSE Field Operations Division (FOD) Operational managers, to discuss what is being done at senior management level to address the risks from V&A and MSDs.

These interventions will focus on the findings from the 2018-22 inspections as detailed in the attached summary report. In addition, they will explore the following areas:

- steps taken by your organisation over recent years at senior level to address the risks from V&A and MSDs;
- leadership in ensuring that sufficient organisational attention, resources and priority are given to the reduction of V&A and MSD risks.

Step Two: Inspectors will carry out several site inspections to seek assurance that what was described to us, in the high-level interventions, is being delivered on the ground.

Inspectors will engage with a cross-section of management and the workforce to assess the measures taken. Feedback on findings, including details of any action required, will be given at the end of the visits, at senior level where possible.

If you have any queries on the above, please do not hesitate to contact us at public.services-sector@hse.gov.uk

Yours faithfully,

John Crookes HM Principal Inspector of Health and Safety

Head of Health and Social Care Services Sector
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Enc: Summary Report

MANAGING VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION AND MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS IN THE NHS

A Summary of findings from April 2018 – March 2022 inspections of NHS Trusts / Boards focusing on workplace violence and aggression and musculoskeletal disorders.

- Between 2018 and 2022, HSE carried out a series of inspections to assess the management and control of risk from musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and violence and aggression (V&A) in the NHS.

- HSE selected these two areas for proactive inspection because they aligned with HSE's strategic priority of reducing work-related ill health. Violence and aggression is a stressor and therefore a contributory factor to work-related stress, which along with MSDs are the two most common causes of new and long-standing, work-related ill health Statistics - Work-related ill health and occupational disease (hse.gov.uk)

- A total of 60 NHS trusts and boards (hereby referred to as NHS Employers for ease of reference) were visited across Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales). This included acute, mental health and community trusts, but not specialist trusts such as ambulance services and represents approximately one in four of these NHS employers. Twenty organisations were inspected in each of three work years (2018-19, 2019-20, and 2021-22).

- In 38 (63%) of the NHS employers inspected over the course of the three work years at least one contravention of health and safety law in respect of management of risk from MSDs or V&A was identified. In 26 (43%) of the organisations inspected they were found to have contraventions across both areas.

- The level of contraventions of the law for V&A (60%) was slightly higher than that of MSDs (47%).

- The rate of contraventions of health and safety law that were found across each of the inspection years was as follows:

Contravention Rate		
	MSDs	V&A
2018-19	**10 (50%)**	**11(55%)**
2019-20	**11 (55%)**	**14 (70%)**
2021-22	**7(35%)**	**11 (55%)**
TOTAL	**28 (47%)**	**36 (60%)**

- Whilst this summary necessarily focuses on the issues identified during the inspections, it is important to note that nearly 40% of NHS employers were compliant or only needed some verbal advice (37%).

- The common feature where contraventions were identified were management failings. These are failings of the management systems and relate to the following four categories:

    - Risk assessment

        - This refers to the steps taken by NHS employers to conduct suitable and sufficient risk assessments to control the risk to employees from MSDs and V&A.

        - Issues identified during the visits included:

            - assessments being too generic, with high-risk areas not being identified;
            - assessments not including non-clinical workers who were exposed to the risk;
            - inconsistencies in the approach to risk assessment across the same organisation.

    - Training

        - This refers to the training on controlling risk from MSDs and V&A provided to employees.

        - Issues identified during the visits included:

            - training was too generic and lacked evidence it was based on a training needs analysis;
            - where training was identified as being mandatory, in practice it was optional for relevant workers to attend;
            - non-clinical workers who were exposed to the risk were not included in training;
            - no suitable assessment of the competency of the trainers.

    - Roles and Responsibilities

        - This refers to the allocation of specific roles and responsibilities within the organisation to effectively supervise and manage the risk to employees from MSDs and V&A.

        - Issues identified during the visits included:

            - a lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities;
            - a lack of wider organisational awareness of who does what;
            - inadequate provision of time and resource given to those with roles and responsibilities;
            - no suitable assessment of the competence of those with specific roles and responsibilities to carry out that work.

    - Monitoring and Review

        - This refers to conducting effective monitoring and review of existing risk control measures to ensure they are effective and that the risks to employees from MSDs and V&A are being effectively managed.

        - Issues identified during the visits included:

            - failure to actively monitor and review control measures to ensure they are effective;
            - insufficient time and resource being allocated to monitoring and review;
            - failure to use available data sources (eg absence data, incident reporting) in the review process;
            - a lack of clarity over what should be reported and how, leading to non-reporting.

- **In particular, the inspections found that, whilst NHS employers generally do have policies and procedures for MSDs and V&A in place, these are often not monitored or reviewed to ensure that they work in practice or remain effective.**

- These findings have been shared with a number of NHS stakeholder groups at national level and NHS unions. It is expected that all NHS employers will review their management systems for these common failings and take any remedial action identified by that review process.

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