

Public availability of sharps disposal containers and non-healthcare worker needlestick injuries

Background: Needlestick injuries are an important public health issue from an occupational health standpoint. While this is especially true for health care professionals, it can also be an issue for others (e.g., sanitation workers, custodial staff, etc.). For those non-healthcare workers, the problem of needlestick injuries may result in part from two factors – the lack of patient knowledge about proper sharps disposal and the lack of availability of sharps disposal containers in public places. This project would primarily focus on sharps disposal in public spaces.

Project brief: This project would logically start with a literature review to determine the potential burden of needlestick injuries in non-healthcare workers. Then the project could involve going out into various public spaces (e.g., restaurants, theatres, airports, etc.) in various communities (e.g., Richmond, Northern Virginia/DC, Roanoke, etc.) to determine the availability of sharps disposal containers. This would require an appropriate sampling plan. It may also be useful to conduct a survey of non-healthcare workers to see if they have experienced needlestick injuries or to survey employers to determine if this is a problem for them and also to determine whether there are policies in place on how to deal with needlestick injuries.

Background required: No specific courses or skills are required outside of those obtained from the MPH Program, but coursework or experience in conducting surveys would be helpful.

Time commitment: Because this project would involve primary data collection, it is anticipated that two semesters would be required to complete the research project. This project, therefore, would likely qualify for 6 credit hours. Ultimately, the amount of time required depends on the number of communities and sites that are selected and whether the non-healthcare worker survey is completed.

Other considerations: Although the primary collection of data about sharps disposal containers is not human subjects research, the student would be required to submit an application to the VCU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval of human subjects research if the non-healthcare workers were surveyed. This process would be a good experience for students in that it would expose them to the IRB review procedure.

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