

SAFETY IN THE MEDICAL WORKPLACE

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Each and every day, your staff and patients walk in and out of your medical facility like a horse with blinders. They all come through the front door expecting to never be in harm's way in respect to their personal safety. As a medical practitioner or provider of medical services, you probably feel the same way.

BUT LET'S TAKE A STEP BACK AND THINK AGAIN

Wikipedia defines safety as "the condition of being protected against physical, social, spiritual, financial, political, emotional, occupational, psychological, educational, or other types or consequences of failure, damage, error, accidents, harm, or any other event which could be considered non-desirable." Safety can also be defined as the control of recognized hazards to achieve an acceptable level of risk. This can take the form of being protected from the event or from exposure to something that causes health or economical losses. It can include protection of people or of possessions.

In this first entry of a two-part series in identifying common risks in your facility, I will identify the risks and hazards associated with your patients and your facility. The second part will identify the risks, hazards, and solutions on the medical side of your practice.

ISSUE: Let's start with your patients, before they come inside for your treatments. Have you really taken precautions in your parking lots and entrance/exits? Have you ensured proper traffic flow in the parking lot, and do you have ample space for them to park? Are there blind spots that may compromise the patient's ability to identify a potential hazard? If not, this may lead to personal injury before they even enter your office.

SOLUTION: Create proper traffic signage in your parking lot to ensure proper flow and direction. Make sure each individual space is large enough for various size vehicles to park to minimize physical damage to patient's vehicles and visibility to oncoming vehicles. Eliminate and remove blind obstacles which may impair one's ability to see oncoming traffic.

"Make sure your stairways and corners of your parking are well lit. You might even consider security cameras in your entrance/exit and corners of your building for internal security measures."

ISSUE: If your facility has an entranceway that is subjected to inclement weather, are the ground and steps slippery and free from the hazards of your patient falling and injuring themselves from a slip, trip, or fall? Remember that people are not always thinking of potential hazards, may be texting, on their cell phones, or even engaging in other conversations with family members instead of watching their step.

SOLUTION: Have the ground and stairs coated with paint that has a sand base, or have strips of sandpaper on the steps to prevent a slip, trip, or fall.

ISSUE: Have you ever really walked out of your facility at night through a patient's eyes? Is the exit area well lit, clean of debris, and in plain sight of any predators (human and/or animal)? It is easy to trip over something you can't see, and during the winter, and after daylight savings time is over, visibility may not be the same as it was only a few short weeks ago.

This may seem somewhat paranoid, but remember that someone's view of a person seeking cosmetic treatments may be perceived as someone with money, and therefore easy prey. Even in the best of neighborhoods you need to be cautious.

SOLUTION: Make sure your stairways and corners of your parking are well lit. You might even consider security

cameras in your entrance/exit and corners of your building for internal security measures. Also remember to change the settings of your exterior lighting when daylight savings time is over.

ISSUE: Once the patient enters your office, are there clear, concise, and consistent markings for means of exit? Are there identifiable and properly lit exit signs identifying the way out of your office in the event of a power outage? Don't take for granted that everyone will leave safely just because you and your staff are aware of the design of your premises.

SOLUTION: Install well lit and identifiable exit signs at each exit and turn in your hallway with arrows pointing to the nearest exit. Test on a regular basis to ensure batteries in the signs are properly charged.

ISSUE: Do you have emergency lighting in several areas of your facility, and in each and every treatment room, that come on automatically in the event of a power failure? When was the last time they were actually checked, verified, and logged for compliance with local and state ordinances?

SOLUTION: Install emergency lights (dual spot lights) that will come on when the power fails. Test regularly and mark the date on the battery. These batteries are inexpensive and should be changed on an annual or semi-annual basis. Do not wait for them to fail. It may just be too late at that point.

ISSUE: Have you recently checked your smoke alarms? Although they may be installed and wired to your electrical system, have you replaced the batteries on a routine basis? Although smoke alarms can be a nuisance when your staff burns popcorn or overheats their lunch in the microwave, they will detect an actual hazard way before it gets out of control.

SOLUTION: Similar to your home, the easiest way to control this hazard is to change the batteries twice a year (the beginning and end of daylight savings time).

ISSUE: When was the last time you really checked the power cords on all of your devices, including extension cords, computers, printers, exam tables, and chairs? One of the biggest hazards in a facility is overloading the power strips/bars. They are designed to handle only a certain amount of current before shutting off. Do you have electric outlets where the covers are either broken or missing? Do you have power cords that are frayed or have wires exposed? Did you just decide to wrap them with electrical

tape and think the problem would just go away? Imagine what can happen if you, or your patients, drop a cup of water of coffee on that exposed wire.

SOLUTION: If you have outlets that have broken or missing covers, replace them. If a power cord is frayed, do not tape them but replace them. Remember that an exposed wire is still full of current no matter how low the voltage is.

Make safety everyone's responsibility and when any potential hazard is seen, remove it immediately. Clean up any/all debris in any area when it is first noticed to prevent the hazard.

Now, while many more hazards exist in your spa or medical office, awareness is the key to prevention. Hazards will continually arise, and preventative maintenance and precautions for eliminating risk are the only way to ensure the safety of you, your patients, and your staff.

SAFETY IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

Do you have any idea how much profit safety adds to your bottom line? Let's put it in a different context. Do you know how much it can cost you by not having a safety prevention program? Safety must start from the top (practice/spa owner) and be at the forefront of everyone's mind. Safety is a culture, both personally and professionally, and cannot be thought of as a burden but rather an added value to your patients and your staff. ■



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