

SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS: SAFETY IN THE MEDICAL WORKPLACE, PART 3

BY JAY A. SHORR, BA, MBM-C, CAC I-V | MANAGING PARTNER THE BEST MEDICAL BUSINESS SOLUTIONS, INC.

In my last article, I wrote on many OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) related regulations, lack of compliance, remedies, and how they relate to the safety of your staff. This article will detail internal safety risks and hazards associated with your employees and practice, and most importantly how you can prevent them from happening in the first place. Let's take a look at slips, trips, and falls (STF), and what your next steps should be.

Let me repeat a question I asked in my last two articles, because it can never be asked enough times: "Do 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.

REMEMBER: Safety is everyone's responsibility.

Before we dive into the most common areas of concern, it's important to know that work related slips, trips, and falls frequently relate to an increased rate of disabling injuries that will impact your practice with your staff not being able to care for patients properly, reduced productivity, extensive amount of time away from your practice, and lastly, expensive injury claims.

Occupational medicine physicians say the issue can never be completely eliminated, but the hazard can be reduced.

In 2011, 2,600 employees of physician offices (including physicians) missed at least one day of work because of strains, sprains, or fractures due to slips, trips, or falls at work, according to US Bureau of Labor Statistics data. Occupational medicine experts believe these numbers most likely underestimate the scope of the problem, because minor incidents often go unreported. Many peo-

ple are surprised to hear how serious falls can be. The average disabling claims cost of a slip, trip, and fall is \$22,000 (SAIF Corp. S918 9/10).

Given the importance of workplace safety and preventing injury, let's take a look at the top five areas of concern and potential solutions:

ISSUE: Liquids and contaminants are the leading cause of STF's in healthcare facilities. These incidents can occur in your hallways, rest rooms, exam rooms, kitchen area, and in your entrance and exit areas. Staff members are not only the culprits, but also the potential victims.

SOLUTION: Establish a safety program that allows for daily inspections of designated areas and continuous monitoring of wet floors. Always have a water absorbent walk off mat in areas where you have sinks. Improper

Modern Aesthetics INNOVATION

A policy must be in place that prohibits risky behavior, like standing on chairs with wheels. Keep a stepstool in a utility closet for minor repairs of items that are out of arm's reach. Make sure ladders and stepstools are placed on level surfaces and that they are fully opened prior to climbing on them.

mats will not absorb fluids. Always have a towel dispenser directly next to sinks so employees and staff can dry their hands immediately after washing them. If you have an ice machine in your office, and many facilities with operating rooms do, make sure there is a proper drip pan installed in the machine and have the machine cleaned annually to prevent soot from collecting in the condensate line.

Staff should wear slip resistant shoes where possible (rubber bottoms). When cleaning a spill, place a sign directly next to the hazard to let others know there is a possible hazard. Don't assume others know the area is wet.

ISSUE: We all have concerns with inclement weather. It doesn't matter if you are located in the Northeast, Midwest or South. Various forms of inclement weather exist and create havoc. Both employees and patients coming into your facility can track rain, snow, and ice onto your floors, which can and will create a hazardous condition.

SOLUTION: A constant maintenance program with at least one designated employee responsible for ensuring that your floors are kept dry from external conditions is a smart choice for any facility. Keep a dry mop close and out of plain view to mop up wet spots brought into the walkways. This will also keep your floors looking clean and presentable. As your staff and patients walk from reception area to exam rooms to the checkout counter, the most simple of hazardous conditions can cause a major injury. Remember the age old saying, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

ISSUE: Improper stepstools and ladders. Have you ever had an employee stand on a chair to reach for something or change a light bulb... or was that you? You can stop nodding your head now. We have all seen a staff member doing a weird looking dance as they try to balance themselves as they stand on a chair with wheels. We all know this is the craziest thing to do; the result can be catastrophic.

SOLUTION: A policy must be in place that prohibits this type of behavior. Keep a stepstool in a utility closet for minor repairs of items that are out of arm's reach. Make sure ladders and stepstools are placed on level surfaces and that they are fully opened prior to climbing on them. Remember, if the ladder feels uneven or wobbly ... then it probably is.

ISSUE: Parking lots and entranceways are prime for hazards. Employees and patients may not be aware of or see overgrown shrubbery, sticks, rodent holes in the ground, or even buckling cement on the ground or sidewalk.

SOLUTION: Have your maintenance or landscaping crew maintain the parking lot properly. If you are in a complex

with maintenance included, this should be part of ongoing maintenance. Try painting your curbs yellow to allow visitors to see that a curb actually exists. Don't assume. Have the parking lot and your pavements and sidewalks swept clean of debris.

ISSUE: Loose and dangling wires may be in plain view. I'm sure you can all remember seeing spaghetti wires underneath your computer or even on top of your desk. Not only are they unsightly, but they're also potentially dangerous. Loose wires and chords exposed in any area create a hazard or potential disaster. The busier we are, the less likely we are to watch where we are walking. Loose wires from mobile equipment also exist in exam rooms. Extension cords on the floor create a potential hazard.

SOLUTION: Place electric cord guards/covers on the floors so the wires can go underneath the guards. You can even tape the wires to the floor as a last resort. Retractable cord holders prevent the cord from remaining on the floor. Consider using cord organizers where you can bundle multiple cords together. It not only makes it look nicer, but also makes it easier to transport multiple cords together.

EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

Safety in the workplace should never be taken lightly. Training is one of the key factors in prevention of workplace injuries and accidents. Although training and purchasing safety supplies and equipment can be costly at times, the cost can never replace the human element of an employee's injury or illness.

Additionally, lost time in the workplace is also an expensive element to consider, along with the stress of employees performing additional duties. But try to remember that rushing to get the same amount of work accomplished with less staff makes everyone less safe and more prone to injury.

Remember, safety is not just the right thing to do—it's the only thing to do. Safety is everyone's responsibility. ■



Jay A. Shorr BA, MBM-C, CAC I-VI is the founder and managing partner of The Best Medical Business Solutions, assisting medical practices with the operational, financial and administrative health of their business. He is also a professional motivational speaker, an advisor to the Certified Aesthetic Consultant program and a certified medical business manager from Florida Atlantic University. He can be reached at info@thebestmbs.com.