AN OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD IDENTIFICATION RISK ASSESSMENT OF SELECTED PUBLIC HOSPITALS IN AN URBAN METROPOLIS IN SOUTH AFRICA

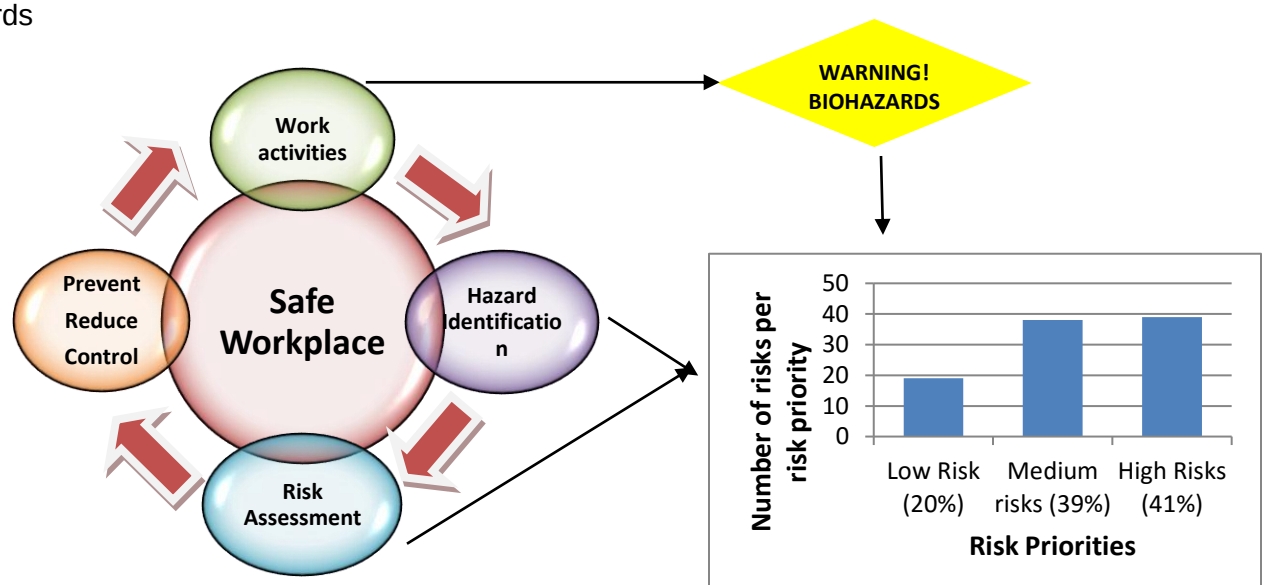
ABSTRACT

Background: Healthcare workers are exposed to a number of hazards in the workplace, particularly in hospitals. These hazards include various communicable diseases, blood borne and airborne pathogenic microorganisms, ionising radiation, allergens, carcinogens, sharps injuries and psychological stressors. Hazard identification risk assessment involves detecting all possible hazards in the workplace, assessing the associated risk levels and evaluating the impact of each risk on the workers' health and wellbeing holistically. To this end we carried out an assessment on selected hospitals in South Africa.

Methods: A public hospital complex comprising of 3 general hospitals was selected. A total of 16 units from the 3 hospitals were assessed. A walk through survey was conducted, during which health and safety hazards were identified in each hospital and the risks associated with each hazard were determined. We evaluated the probability and severity of workers exposure to prevailing environmental hazards at the workplace. The assessment was based on the type of work performed, associated hazards and the magnitude of the risks involved. The risk rating for each identified risk was calculated by multiplying the probability of the risk occurring with the consequence of such risk. Thereafter, the risks were categorised into low, medium or high priority risks.

Results: 96 risks were observed at the hospital complex: 20% of the risks were low priority risks, 39% were medium priority risks, which receive second priority when implementing control strategies, and 41% were high priority risks, which should receive first priority when implementing control strategies. High priority risks were observed in 94% of the units. Medium priority risks were observed in 69% of the units. Low priority risks were observed in 50% of the units.These risks range from cuts, scratches and bruises to exposure to blood borne pathogens.

Conclusions: The present study recorded an alarming percentage of high priority risks. High priority risks demand urgent attention geared towards prevention and control of workplace hazards



Graphical representation of abstract

MTEMBU, C.S.