

Occupational risks of working in the healthcare sector

A large part of occupational diseases arises precisely in connection with the performance of the profession of a health professional. During the performance of his profession, a health worker is exposed to a number of risk factors, which can be divided into "specific" and "non-specific". **Non-specific risk factors' are night shifts (shift work), stress, physically and mentally demanding work, lack of rest and free time.** Specific risk factors are physical, chemical and biological factors.

Physical Factors

Physical factors include non-ionizing radiation where we find UV radiation, diathermy and laser where the target organ is the skin and the eye.^[1] We also have ionizing radiation to which the workers of radiotherapy and radiodiagnostic workplaces are exposed. Physical factors also include vibration and noise, for example in dental workplaces.

Chemical Factors

We can be exposed to chemical factors when using means for chemical disinfection and sterilization. Furthermore, when handling metallic mercury in dentistry, anaesthetics, allergenic substances and cytostatics, which may have carcinogenic (IARC 1: chlorambucil, tamoxifen, azathioprine, ...), mutagenic, teratogenic or allergenic potential.

Biological factors

Biological factors include diseases and infections that a doctor can contract from a patient. These diseases include: scabies, HBV, HCV, HAV, HIV, TB, influenza, childhood exanthema infections and a whole host of other infections. The risk of occupational infectious complications can be 'minimized' by following proper work procedures, using protective equipment, vaccinations, following the principles of personal hygiene, disinfection and sterilization.

Mental Load

A high level of psychological stress is inextricably linked to the profession of a health care professional. The doctor is responsible for the patient's state of health, i.e. for his life. He is often forced to make quick and serious decisions (e.g. amputation of a limb after severe trauma) or procedures with which he internally disagrees (artificial termination of pregnancy). He is daily in contact with human suffering and pain, often with human death and the grief of the family and friends of the deceased; during some diagnostic or therapeutic procedures, the pain is self-inflicted (e.g. injection). Interpersonal relationships at the workplace also have a great influence on the doctor's psyche. This disturbed mental balance, combined with physical exhaustion and chronic stress, can lead to the so-called burnout syndrome. In addition, individual healthcare professions have their own specific stressors and risks. E.g. for the medical rescue workers *there was also a high degree of responsibility, the need to suppress one's emotions, the need to make decisions very quickly and act very quickly, uneven distribution of work performance during working hours, triage of the wounded, work in adverse climatic conditions (rain, winter), etc.* According to a study started in 2003, the biggest stressor for medical emergency services workers is *unsuccessful cardiopulmonary resuscitation or the death of a child.*^[2]

Physical stress

High physical load (operations lasting several hours, long shifts including night shifts, lack of rest) also has a negative effect on the human organism. For nurses, paramedics and rehabilitation workers, it is necessary to emphasize the physically demanding work in inpatient wards (manipulation of unconscious patients, rehabilitation of partially immobile patients, handling of linen and medical equipment in general; moving patients is associated with the development of musculoskeletal disorders^[3]). The *forced positions* of dentists and dental laboratory technicians can be the cause of compressive syndromes.

Links

Related Articles

- Disinfection and Sterilization
- Radiation load
- Radiation protection



New additional label: *Danger of invisible, health-damaging radiation.*

References

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