

PREVENTIVE MEASURES AIMED AT PROTECTING HEALTHCARE WORKERS FROM HEPATITIS B VIRUS INFECTION AT THE WORKPLACE

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Background: Due to the specificity of the work they perform, the complexity of invasive procedures and exposure to the patient's biological material, health workers are exposed to the occurrence of blood-borne diseases, among which hepatitis B virus infection, which has great public health importance, occupies a special place.

Methods and Objectives: This research was conducted as a cross-sectional study in state primary and secondary healthcare institutions in the city of Šabac (*Dr Draga Ljočić Health Center and Dr. Laza K. Lazarević General Hospital*) among 200 doctors and nurses, 100 from both institutions.

As a research instrument, a questionnaire specially constructed for the purposes of this research was used, in order to evaluate and analyze data related to the protection measures of respondents at the workplace. It contained questions about the existence of written instructions on measures to protect health workers during work, the degree of exposure to blood-borne infections, being tested for the same during employment, the frequency of implementation of protection, as well as the performance of medical-technical actions during one shift/working day in which they contact the patient's biological material.

Results: On the basis of statistical data processing using adequate tests depending on which variables were involved, a highly statistically significant difference ($p=0.000$) was determined in the continuity of the implementation of protection in relation to institutions, because employees in primary health care more often stated affirmatively about the permanence of implementation protection. Also, statistical significance was detected in relation to the respondent's profile ($p=0.003$), because continuity in the implementation of protection was more often stated by nurses-technicians with secondary education, as well as in relation to the workplace of the respondent, since they recognized the continuity in the implementation of protective measures more often healthcare workers employed in outpatient clinics of the observed institutions ($p=0.000$).

The existence of written instructions on protection measures against hepatitis B virus infection was confirmed by 90% of respondents; 81% of the sample think that they are also exposed to other blood-borne infections (hepatitis C and HIV infection); 64.5% of respondents were not tested for blood-borne infections when starting their employment relationship, 91% of respondents perform daily procedures in which they come into contact with the biological material of the patient, and all respondents (100%) were vaccinated against hepatitis B.

Conclusions: Hepatitis B virus infection is a public health problem. Health workers are more exposed to risk than the general population, so education on compliance with preventive measures should be implemented already in secondary schools, and continued at higher levels of education. All strategies adopted by reference bodies must be implemented on time, so that they are respected from the moment, establishing an employment relationship, and during the entire working life of each healthcare worker. Every strategy that has been adopted at the global level aims to reduce to a minimum and even eradicate hepatitis B, due to its serious consequences for health.

Keywords: healthcare workers, hepatitis B, exposure, prevention, public health