European standards – influencing practice

Much debate within the political arena continues regarding the benefits of the United Kingdom joining the European Union with one focus on the single currency and another on immigration and cross boundary working.

In a previous President’s message (June 2009) I outlined the plans within the NHS Constitution based on a European Directive, which would allow patients to travel abroad for treatment under certain circumstances. Will or are European legislation/standards impacting on perioperative practice? The answer is yes and I would like to highlight two examples.

A new EU Directive – to prevent injuries and infections to healthcare workers from sharp objects such as needle sticks - was agreed in March 2010. EU member states will have three years to implement this within national legislation. Many needlestick injuries are avoidable and strategies/tools are available to reduce the risk, and although significant numbers are reported many more go unrecorded. The Health and Safety Executive identified that the aim of this Directive is to:-

1. Achieve the safest possible working environment
2. Prevent workers injuries caused by all medical sharps
3. Protect workers at risk
4. Set up policies in risk assessment, risk prevention, training, information, awareness raising and monitoring.

www.hse.gov.uk/healthservice/needlestick/eu-directive.htm

The European Biosafety Network called on national governments to take action without delay. Our colleagues in the European Operating Room Nurses Association (EORNA) have distributed this requesting support and engagement by perioperative practitioners to ensure action is taken internationally as this affects and will impact directly on practice and patient care. I urge you to discuss this with your infection control and occupational health colleagues.

The other European standard which can influence practice is EN13795 (Surgical drapes, gowns and clean air suits used as medical devices in healthcare facilities for patients, clinical staff and equipment). The standard was developed to support medical devices directives and drapes and gowns are classified as medical devices and therefore must be CE marked as official recognition of their compliance with the directive. However there is no legal requirement for the manufacturers to comply with the standards but this will become the benchmark for purchasers, perioperative users and patients to identify that manufacturers have met the minimum requirements. How many of you were aware of these standards and how you can influence perioperative practice and direct patient care by ensuring that your drapes and gowns have a CE mark and meet the EU standard?

Being a part of the wider European Union can and will influence our professional and personal lives. It can help to make a difference so don’t be left behind when new legislation comes along.

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