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2-year Work Smart Project on “Elimination of Mercury-containing instruments” in AHNH, TPH and Tai Po GOPCs

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Introduction

Mercury spill in workplace can be a chemical hazard if not managed properly. The common mercury containing instruments in healthcare are thermometers and sphygmomanometers. Mercury may have toxic effects on the nervous, digestive and immune systems, and on other organs. Besides, the volatile property of mercury can increase staff or patient exposure during spills and the route of exposure is mainly inhalation. OSH committee has recognized the importance of chemical safety and liaised with the clinical and non-clinical units to launch a 2-year project to eliminate mercury-containing instruments in AHNH, TPH and two Tai Po GOPCs.

Objectives

- 1.To eliminate all mercury-containing instruments in AHNH, TPH and Tai Po GOPCs
- 2.To provide mercury-free alternatives for substitution

Methodology

The project was carried out in 2 phases.

First phase was started by setting up a Work Smart Taskforce in 2Q 2014 with hospital GM(N) as chairperson and membership including Nursing department heads representatives, Administrative department manager and OSH officer. A schedule of disposal of mercury-containing instruments in clinical areas at AHNH, TPH and Tai Po GOPCs was formulated and mercury-free alternatives were searched for substitution. 1st stock-take of inventory of mercury-containing instruments was conducted. Discussion on pros and cons of keeping mercury-containing instrument was shared in nursing briefing session. Collaboration between OSH Committee and Hospital Administration Department on proper and safe disposal of the mercury-containing

instruments was achieved in 1Q2015.

Second phase was started by OSH Committee to ensure elimination of all mercury-containing instruments at clinical areas after completion of first phase and extended the exercise to non-clinical area in 4Q 2015. Therefore, two more stock-takes of mercury-containing instruments were done. The project was coordinated by OSH Committee and the progress was reported in OSH and Quality and Safety meetings.

Result

With the concerted effort by OSH team, CND and Administrative department, over 470 mercury-containing instruments were disposed from 2014-2016. AHNH, TPH and two Tai Po GOPCs are now free from mercury-containing instruments. This project demonstrated management's commitment in minimizing occupational hazards by using mercury-free alternatives. Most important of all, our staff can adopt a safer work practice without risking their health .