



Safe Injection Technologies – A Primer

The Issue

Recent outbreaks of hepatitis C in the United States have put the spotlight on unsafe injection practices in outpatient clinics and physician offices. The specific outbreaks in question were caused by the reuse of syringes on multiple patients and by drawing medication from multi-dose vials. Outrage continues to grow among patient advocates, healthcare providers and the government, with many wondering how this rash of “Never Events” could ever happen in the most advanced healthcare system in the world.

The Impact

Unsafe injection practices – such as inappropriate vial use and reuse of syringes for IV access – needlessly expose patients to deadly bloodborne pathogens, such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV. While the actual number of victims is difficult to estimate, public health officials over the last decade have notified more than 100,000 people in the United States that they have suffered potential exposure due to these unsafe practices. Hepatitis outbreaks over the past two years alone have sickened hundreds of people in six states. The U.S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has indicated that these known cases may be just the “tip of the iceberg.”¹

The Challenges

Many obstacles must be overcome to address the unsafe practices that ultimately jeopardize patient safety. As care has shifted over past decades from hospitals to more outpatient settings, a severe lack of understanding has emerged about current regulations and guidelines governing basic safe injection practices and infection control protocols. In addition, healthcare professionals do not have access to all of the available technologies designed to eliminate syringe and needle reuse, and thus, the risk of patient infection from unsafe injection practices. Unlike in developing countries, syringe reuse has not been considered a significant problem in the United States. Hence, some of these technologies have not been available to U.S. healthcare providers.

The Solutions

Reducing the risk to patients from unsafe injections will require a multifaceted approach to address the root causes of the problem. These efforts must combine necessary safe injection practices training, more effective regulations at the national and state levels, and better use of available technologies. The CDC and the non-profit patient advocacy group HONORreform are among the organizations leading these efforts.

BD, the pioneer in safety-engineered injection devices designed to protect both patients and healthcare workers, provides significant expertise in injection practices, as well as a comprehensive product portfolio for a wide variety of care settings. These solutions include auto-disable injection devices that only allow syringes and needles to be used on one patient. Widely used in developing countries for mass vaccination campaigns and clinical applications, auto-

disable syringes could be one part of the solution in the United States if appropriate needlestick protection features are incorporated. BD also offers a complete line of prefillable syringes, which are sold to pharmaceutical companies as an alternative to providing therapies or vaccines in vials. By eliminating the need to draw medication from single- or multi-dose vials altogether, prefilled syringes eliminate a significant cause of contamination and infection. BD is committed to helping healthcare providers identify the root causes of potential problems, improve injection practices and employ proven technologies to protect patients from needless exposure to deadly and debilitating infectious diseases.

¹Werner, Erica. "CDC warns of safety problems at clinics." Associated Press, 4 March 2008.
http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-03-03-2306618_x.htm

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