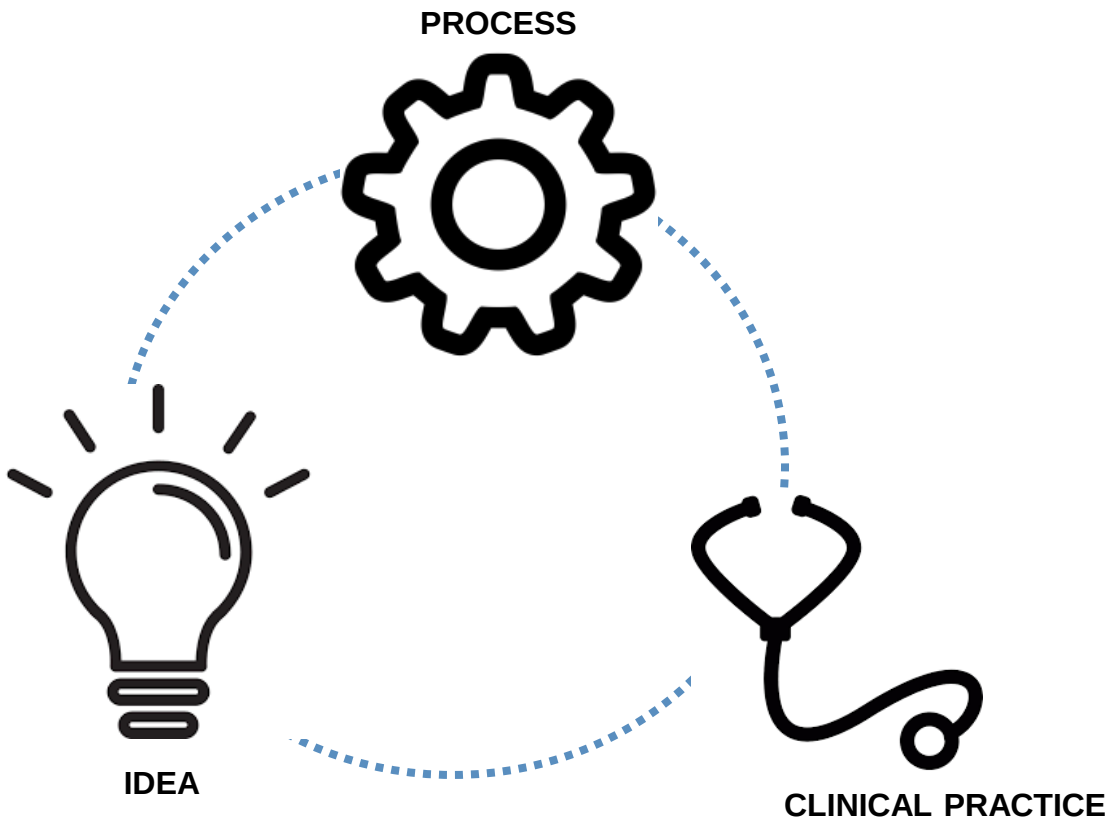
A 5-Step Plan to Improve Sharps Safety



Step One: Help Build Awareness

Awareness is a key aspect of successful change management. In healthcare, evidence-based practice is a basic requirement, so researching the problem and its solutions is necessary.

Groups such as EPINet public statistics and research into sharps injury incident rates, however there are still gaps in this research– especially as the reporting rates for sharps injuries remain low.

Supporting research into sharps safety and enacting regular reporting of incidents or near misses can help make research more accurate and assist in making evidence-based decisions.

Public awareness campaigns can also encourage government attention, staff engagement, and management support of the issue.

Poster for sharps safety awareness, designed by the Centers of Disease and Prevention (CDC)

Step Two: Enforce Regulations

Enforcing regulations aimed at preventing sharps injuries must be undertaken to ensure effective sharps safety in organisation.

Sharps safety measures have been incorporated in many countries around the world in:

- Legislative Regulations –
  - Needlestick Safety and Prevention Act (USA)
  - European Council Directive 2010/32/EU (Europe)

- Standards and industry guidelines –
  - Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 3825:1998 (Australia),
  - Institute of Chiropodists and Podiatrists Standard (UK)
  - Association of Surgical Technicians Guidelines (USA)

FIGURE 1 SCALPEL BLADE REMOVER

Note: Figure 1 Illustrates the removal of a scalpel blade from the handle, but the design of the illustrated scalpel blade remover does not form part of the Standard.

FIGURE 2 REMOVAL BY ARTERY FORCEPS

Note: Removal by artery forceps or similar devices is *not* recommended.

Scalpel blade removal recommendations from the Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 3825:1998

Step Three: Use Safety Equipment

The Centres of Disease and Control (CDC) estimates that 62 to 88% of sharps injuries can be prevented simply by using safer medical devices.

Organisations should review their budget for safety equipment and ensure that adequate protection against sharps injuries is provided for healthcare workers.

Passive devices, where the safety mechanism is activated automatically, offer superior safety to active devices, where the safety mechanism has to be activated by the user.

To prevent needlestick injuries, a passive device such as a spring-loading retraction device is preferable to a syringe with a guard. Likewise, a single-handed scalpel blade removers should be used to prevent scalpel blade injuries.

Single-handed scalpel blade removers can prevent scalpel injuries (top)
Re-usable ampoule openers can prevent ampoule cuts

Step Four: Administrative Actions

Administrative Actions are the policies and habits hospitals implement to improve sharps safety.

These can include:

Employee education programs on how to avoid sharps injuries, and regular product training

Policies regulating safety equipment use, reporting injuries, and a vaccine program

Quality improvement committee to review policies and their effectiveness

Safety score card to measure clinician engagement with sharps safety measures

Step Five: Management Support

Management support is essential to translate the organisation's sharps safety program to all levels of the organization.

Hospital management can demonstrate their support through:

Allocating financial resources for purchasing of safer sharps devices

Creating a supportive , no-blame culture to encourage reporting of sharps injuries

Using positive language in relation to improvements to sharps policies and practices

Summary

1. Support Awareness	• Research into sharps safety concerns • Public and employee awareness campaigns
2. Enforce Regulations	• Legislative Regulations • Standards and industry guidelines
3. Safety Equipment	• Passive (automatic) safety-engineered devices • Eg. retractable safety syringe, single-handed scalpel blade remover
4. Administrative Actions	• Regular training on sharps compliance and equipment • Reporting system for incidents • Committee to review sharps procedures • Safety scorecard to asses efficacy of program
5. Management Support	• Allocating financial resources • Creative a supportive environment • Use positive language around improved practices

Benefits of Investing in Sharps Safety

A systematic focus on safety has been reported to have the following flow-on effects:

- Increased quality of patient care and service
- Efficient patient flow
- Decreased absenteeism and overtime
- Reduced lost time (caused by injuries or sickness)
- Reduced need for agency staff (lower costs)
- Higher staff retention
- Improved communication and teamwork
- Higher work satisfaction and productivity
- A healthier, stable workforce

Staff and patients are benefitted by healthcare facilities investing in safety and implementing a sharps safety plan

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