The role of social partners in addressing occupational (musculoskeletal and psychosocial) disorders in health care in European member states

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1. Introduction

Healthcare is one of the most significant sectors in the EU economy employing directly around one in every ten workers in the EU. The sector, however, faces major challenges when it comes to occupational health problems among nurses working in health care. These problems are multi-faceted and complex and stem from the combined effect of different factors. It is on this backdrop the joint work program 2014-2016 of HOSPEEM (European Hospital and Healthcare Employers’ Association) and EPSU (European Federation of Public Service Unions) has developed a strong focus on the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders at work in hospitals. The project is intended to support European member states to facilitate their work on 1. Identifying how actions on occupational health and wellbeing contribute to improved health of the nursing workforce in hospitals as well as (2) to reduce the problems associated with retention within the healthcare sector. The project is relevant for the EU-level social partners in the hospital sector.

The assumption is that improved health and safety conditions are expected to have a positive impact on the recruitment and retention of health workers and on the efficiency of the healthcare institutions. The content and the message of the CEN ISO Technical Report 122 96 (Manual Handling of People in Healthcare(Hignett et al., 2014)) is leading in the project when it comes to the physical aspects. The other cornerstone consists of the psychosocial factors leading to reduced occupational health in nurses. Both cornerstones form the core of this project.

2. Method

Early 2015 a survey was conducted asking the formal representatives of social partners in the member states to assess the level of ergonomic, physical and psychosocial risk factors in health care, available scientific knowledge and barriers they encounter in their own state. In addition to this they are asked to assess the role and power of so called ‘drivers’ in their society: unions, employers, labour inspectorate, nursing schools, insurance companies, vendors, (academic) experts and patient organisations.

3. Results and discussion

The results of the survey were discussed with representatives from all member states at a conference in Paris (March 25, 2015) and will lead to a publication covering all above mentioned aspects. The results will outline and reflect the perspective of the formal representatives of social partners in the EU on the topic of occupational health in hospitals in Europe.

At this moment results are being processed and will be reported shortly after March 2015 and are therefore available at the Melbourne Conference IEA 2015.

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References