

NEWS

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Women's Resource Center Opens

Meeting Needs Of Workers, Researchers, Legislators

The Women's Occupational Health Resource Center, a national informational and educational clearinghouse for women workers, policymakers, scientists, business people, and others has been organized in New York City to help meet the occupational health needs of women workers and their advocates.

The Resource Center is housed in the American Health Foundation, a major preventive medicine organization, and is under the direction of Jeanne M. Stellman, Executive Director. The Center has received widespread support, including a planning grant under the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration's New Directions program.

Other supporters of the Center's activities include the United Church Board of Homeland Ministries, the United Auto Workers International Union, the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO, and the Ford Foundation.

Education and Coordination

A primary function of the Center is to collect and interpret scientific literature related to the occupational health concerns of women. The information will be disseminated through this newsletter, a quarterly Technical Bulletin, informational packets, specific bibliographic search requests and WOHRC sponsored and coordinated workshops, classes and roundtables.

Another major function of the Women's Occupational Health Resource Center will be to inform the growing number of organizations that are concerned with occupational health of national and international activities that focus on the women's issue.

Target Audience

The work of the Center will be aimed at two audiences. One consists of workers and other lay people while the other is the technical community of scientists, physicians and other in similar professions. It is anticipated, however, that most of the



WOHRC staff: Barbara Lynch, Monte Hewson, Jeanne Stellman, Deborah Ensign and Michael Duncan.

material will be useful to all those concerned with women's occupational health.

Advisory Board Named

A distinguished Advisory Board composed of representatives from government, labor, health, management, church, and community groups has been appointed. Lynne Billman, PHD, U.S. Women's Bureau; JoAnne Fischer, Women's Health Concerns Comm., Pa. Dept. of Health; Cynthia Hosay, Sch. of Ind. and Labor

Relations, Cornell University; Vilma Hunt, DDS, Penn. State Univ.; Arthur B. Keys, Jr., United Church Board of Homeland Ministries; Odessa Komer, V.P. United Auto Workers Union; Joyce Kornbluh, Inst. Labor and Ind. Rel., U. of Mich.; Jacqueline Messite, M.D., NIOSH; Joyce D. Miller, President, CLUW; Sara Nelson, Nat'l Org. of Women; and Leon Warshaw, M.D., Equitable Life, have all agreed to serve as Advisory Board Members.

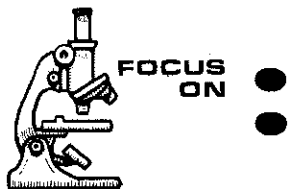
Facts About Women Workers

Almost two million women work in fifty industries where a substantial number of hazardous substances are in common use. And, in a number of these industries, women workers represent a plurality of all workers. Many also are employed in several industries which have high injury rates. Almost 2.5 million are employed in thirty industries with workday loss rates of more than seven per hundred workers. For example, the leather industry, which is sixty-one percent female, has higher number of injuries and workday losses than the national average. In other high risk occupations, such as many kinds of health work, women represent the majority. Seventy-five percent of all health workers and eighty-five percent of all hospital workers are women. Of course, there are risks even in lower risk occupations

like clerical work. And no injury or illness—no matter how minor—is pleasant or easy to deal with.

Percentages of Workers Who Are Women in High Health Risk Industries

Industries Which Use Hazardous Substances	% Of Workers Who Are Women
Electronic components & accessories	53
Fats and oils	46
Preserved fruits and vegetables	43
Weaving mills, cotton	42
Miscellaneous plastic products	41
Weaving mills, synthesis	39
Soap, cleaners and toilet goods	38
Fabricated rubber products, etc.	37
Rubber and plastics footwear	37
Glass and glassware, pressed or blown	34
Pottery and related products	33
Miscellaneous electric equipment and supplies	33
Meat products	30



Health And Safety In

Lab Workers' Survey Pinpoints Hazards

Working in a laboratory that is improperly equipped or that provides inadequate health and safety precautions can be dangerous to your health. A recent survey conducted by District 1199 of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees in 34 New York City hospitals showed that 7 percent of the laboratory workers reported a history of hepatitis, a serious infection associated with laboratory work. The percentage of hepatitis observed in this survey among laboratory workers is more than twice the incidence rate of hepatitis of the general public.

Problem Areas Noted

The hospital laboratory workers noted several problem areas in particular in their survey responses. These included inadequate laboratory ventilation, improper pipetting practices, and insufficient and sloppy garbage disposal facilities.

One finding of note was that of the workers surveyed who use pipettes regularly (pipettes are strawlike devices for transferring liquids), 82 percent used their mouths for pipetting at least occasionally and nearly half had at one time or another accidentally taken in a mouthful of liquid. The hepatitis risk among these workers was nearly three times as great as among those who had never gotten liquids in their mouths. Automatic pipettes were not routinely provided or used in most hospital laboratories.

Other Health Hazards

Other health hazards most often reported by lab workers were:

- Contact with patients who have communicable diseases
- Improper procedures for blood, urine, and stool specimen collection which allow contact with specimens
- Inadequate labelling and packaging of specimens
- Inadequately functioning hoods in the lab or poor lab ventilation
- Inadequate systems for garbage collection in the lab (e.g., open containers, disposal of sharp items with discarded specimens)

Safety measures suggested by the study are illustrated on this page. Results of the survey appear in an article in the *Journal of Preventive Medicine* authored by Jeanne and Steven Stellman of the American Health Foundation and Judy Berek and Arlene Ezratty of 1199. (See page 4 for details on how to order this.)

WOHRC Interns on the Job: Lab Health Flowsheets

Health and safety checklists and flow-sheet diagrams, which can be used by workers and others as a guide to inspect their laboratories for hazards were developed by WOHRC interns Peter Bellin and Beth Askue from a survey carried out in cooperation with Long Island Jewish Hospital in New York and District 1199.

The checklists cover general working conditions such as noise, ventilation, chemical showers, etc. Safety checklists also inventory general lab procedures, such as pipetting and disposal of contaminated materials, protective clothing and employee regulations.

Flowsheets designed to follow the flow of biological samples through hospital routines from patient areas to the laboratory were also constructed. Using these flow sheets, the potential route of infection can be traced and sources of disease pinpointed and eliminated.

The flowsheets are available from the Resource Center. Write WOHRC for further information.

Do's And



Pipetting by mouth is a major health risk factor in laboratory work. This lab worker is posing herself to hepatitis by using an automatic pipette to handle infected specimens. Automatic pipettes should be used in the laboratory.



This lab worker is handling specimens that are bagged, stored, and labelled. Good lab practices are essential for the organized transport of specimens from patient areas to messengers to the lab.



Women's Occupational Health Resource Center

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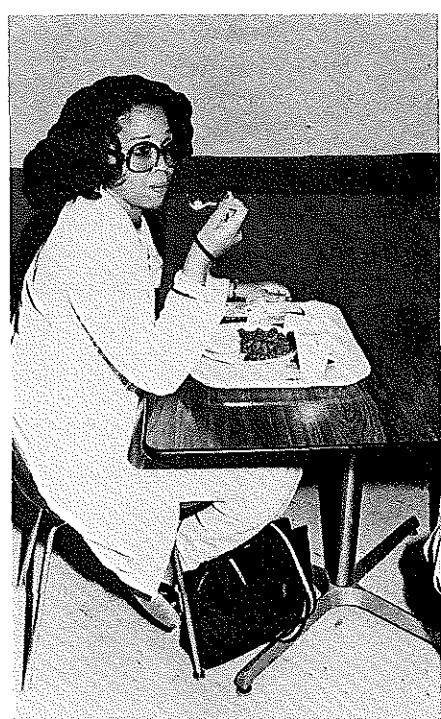
(Subscription information on page 4.)

The Clinical Laboratory

Don'ts In The Laboratory



This lab worker is correctly pipetting by hand and is using a test tube rack. Use of the rack decreases the chance of spreading infection from lab spills.



Lab workers should never wear their lab coats when eating in the cafeteria. While eating, this lab worker may unknowingly transfer contaminated specimens from her lab coat to her mouth.

Hepatitis Hazards In The Workplace

Viral hepatitis is a serious contagious infection of the liver. In an occupational setting it is usually contracted by contact with the blood of infected patients.

Occupationally caused hepatitis is often not recognized and in most states it is not considered a compensable disease under the Worker's Compensation Law. In New York State it is, however, and largely as a result of a lawsuit initially brought by the compensation attorney of District 1199 hospital workers union.

The Union laboratory committee was galvanized into action when four cases of hepatitis among chemistry lab workers were identified within one year and an additional 16 cases were also found among employees in the blood gases lab and in intensive care units. (A member of the committee herself also contracted the disease.)

When District 1199 brought these cases before the Compensation Courts, hospital management did not contest them and together with the precedent set in the preceding case firmly established hepatitis as a compensable illness in New York.

Safety, Not Compensation, the Goal

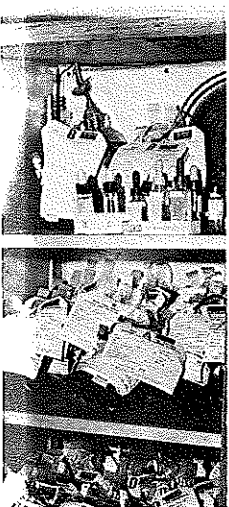
But safety, not just worker's compensation, was the goal of the Union, so in cooperation with hospital management the following problem areas were identified by canvassing and surveying the hospital:

- Lack of precaution in handling serum specimens
- Pipetting potentially infected samples by mouth
- Failure to sterilize glass pipettes after use
- Infrequent washing of laboratory floors
- Garbage cans overflowing with discarded specimens
- Contamination of lab sinks and fixtures during specimen disposal
- Uniforms which were difficult to remove for coffee breaks or lunch

Education and Training

The widespread occurrence of hepatitis in the laboratory can be credited to the lack of inservice training and education of workers by their supervisors. The pictures on this page are part of an ongoing training program sponsored by District 1199 to make workers themselves aware of proper laboratory health and safety procedures.

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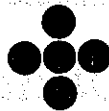
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BASIC TRAINING:

The following books and pamphlets are available through the Women's Occupational Health Resource Center. Simply check the items you would like, and enclose this page with your check or money order.

- "WOMEN'S WORK IS..." RESOURCES ON WORKING WOMEN, edited by Bobbi Wells Hargleroad, published by the Institute on the Church in Urban-Industrial Society, 1978. A thorough bibliographic reference covering all aspects of women in the workplace. \$4.00
- A WORKING WOMAN'S GUIDE TO HER JOB RIGHTS, U.S. Dept. of Labor, Women's Bureau, Leaflet 55, 1975. Information about Federal legislation which affects women when they are seeking a job, while they are on the job, and when they retire. \$.65
- WOMEN'S WORK, WOMEN'S HEALTH, by Jeanne Stellman, Ph.D., Pantheon Bks., 1977. Dispels the myths surrounding women and work. Useful information on the health hazards found in the ten occupations where most working women are found. \$3.95 softcover
- WORKING FOR YOUR LIFE: A WOMEN'S GUIDE TO JOB HEALTH HAZARDS, Andrea Hricko and Melanie Brunt. Joint publication by the Labor Occupational Health Program and Public Citizen's Health Research Group. Summary and overview of women's occupational health hazards in a variety of fields. \$5.00
- WORK IS DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH, Jeanne Stellman, Ph.D. and Susan Daum, M.D., Pantheon Bks., 1973. A handbook of health hazards in the workplace and what you can do about them. \$3.95 softcover
- HEALTH OF WOMEN AT WORK, Vilma Hunt, 1977. A bibliography and commentary by an expert in the field, published by Northwestern Univ. \$6.00
- GUIDELINES ON PREGNANCY AND WORK, NIOSH Research Report, 1977. Information on how to protect the health of the pregnant worker and her fetus. Free
- COMPREHENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY ON PREGNANCY AND WORK, NIOSH, 1978. Compiled by the Am. College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. \$3.00
- OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROBLEMS OF PREGNANT WOMEN, Vilma Hunt, 1975. A report and recommendations to the Secretary of the Dept. of HEW. Free
- LEAD: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON AN OLD PROBLEM, Karen Bjorn, Joan Spivak and Jeanne Stellman. Information about occupational lead poisoning and how the exposure standard may adversely affect the rights of women workers. Free

- REDUCING OCCUPATIONAL STRESS, NIOSH Research Report, 1978. Recently released proceedings of a conference held in May, 1977. American, British and Scandinavian methods of dealing with relationships between occupational stress and health. Twenty-four papers show the similarities and differences in approach to stress among industrialized nations. Free



Preventive Medicine

An International Journal devoted to Practice and Theory

Volume 7, Number 3, September 1978

The most recent issue of *Preventive Medicine*, the journal of the American Health Foundation, contains a special forum on women's occupational health. Single copies of this issue are available through the Center for \$4.00 (students, union members) and \$6.00 (others).

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