



HEALTH CARE WORKERS SUFFERING INJURIES ON THE JOB

Health care workers can suffer serious injuries while on the job, just ask Lisa Black. Black was caring for a patient infected with AIDS when she was accidentally punctured by a needle that had been inserted in the patient's IV line. Nine months after the puncture, black became ill and discovered that she had AIDS. "There's really not words to describe that moment," Black said, according to the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. "But, I thought: At least it's not one of my kids." When this first happened, nearly 14 years ago, Black thought she would become one of the very few health care workers who died from an illness they contracted while working the job. "We remain concerned that more workers are injured in the health care and social assistance industry sector than in any other, including construction and manufacturing, and this group of workers had one of the highest rates of injuries and illness at 5.2 cases for every 100 workers," United States Department of Labor Secretary Hilda L. Solis said in October. The 2010 rate of 5.2 percent can be compared to the rate for all private industry of 3.5 cases for every 100 workers. Paul O'Neill, the former Alcoa CEO and UPMC board member, appeared on a talk show ('4802') on WQED back in November. He said the following during his appearance: "I've had this conversation with the board of directors at UPMC. They haven't got the foggiest notion what the injury rates are, which tells me they don't really care about the 54,000 people who work there, or they would know, and they would have a deliberate process to eliminate injury rates that occur to nurses and technicians and doctors every day." Officials from UPMC disagree with some of O'Neill's statements: "The safety of our employees and patients has always been paramount at UPMC," said Paul Wood, UPMC's spokesman. David Weir, the president of UPMC Work Partners, had the following to say, "We go to great lengths to disseminate our reports across the UPMC system." O'Neill worked on the board of UPMC from 2003 to 2004 until he quit. He quit when UPMC refused to implement a plan to reduce medication errors that had been proposed by the Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative, which is an organization that he helped to found. "It's a national scandal that the injury rates are so high in health care," O'Neill said. Azure Albeck, an economist for the Labor Department, discussed injuries on the job: "We see very many back strains, from workers picking up or helping up patients. And that makes up a third of all injuries." The next largest categories are slips, trips and falls, usually ones that occur on water spilled on floors of hospitals and nursing homes or other health facilities. Needlesticks, which is what caused Black's injury, is another leading category of injury for health care workers while on the job.

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