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CARRYING OUT A SERVICE USER RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk assessment is often essentially needs assessment, with a concentration on risks to the service user, sometimes to the exclusion of risks posed by the service user to staff and other groups. There is an obvious advantage in making one assessment for all the areas of risk associated with service users.

Where risk assessments look at risks to staff, organisations tend to focus on the higher risk issues with a particular service user group. Therefore, nursing homes will look at moving and handling risks and homes for people with mental health needs or hostels for the homeless will tend to look at risks to staff from violence.

It is useful to have a proforma for these assessments, which covers all the areas of risk which may be relevant for a service user group. Even if many areas are simply marked N/A this still provides evidence that the risk in question has been considered. I consider it important that a risk assessment demonstrates actual rating of risk, and this is probably most simply done by providing a "1,2,3" or "high, medium, low" selection for the assessor to circle.

It is also important to consider emergencies that can arise with a service user, for instance if they become excited or distressed, if they suffer a fall or if they have an epileptic fit, for example. Where possible emergencies can be foreseen, it is useful for staff working with the service user to note any triggers for the problem, and the best way of dealing with it.

Still on emergency situations but becoming more general, it is vital to consider the likely needs of the service user in the event of an external emergency such as a fire. Is it likely that, for instance, a resident of a hostel for people with mental health needs will not respond to the fire alarm? How will a resident of a sheltered scheme who has hearing loss know that the fire alarm is sounding? The risk assessment process is most useful when all these foreseeable problems are considered ahead, and sensible actions to take are communicated to all staff.

The best thing for organisations to do is to develop their own risk assessment proforma, including enough detail to guide the assessor through the required thinking process. When a risk assessment system is put together in house, it properly reflects the values and

concerns of the organisation, and is more likely to be well used.

Areas for consideration if you are putting together or revising your risk assessment for service users might include:

- Violence or aggression to staff or other service users
- Self harm
- Self neglect
- Loss of independence
- Moving and handling needs
- Frailty, disability or health problems
- Risk of falls
- Environmental needs, support needs, needs in case of emergency
- Contact with family and community
- Transmissible infections (TB, MRSA)

I'm sure there are lots more. If anyone has a service user risk assessment format they are proud of or find particularly effective, we will be pleased to post it to our website for sharing with the wider community.

Not to forget the essentials, these risk assessments must be reviewed regularly, and immediately in the event of a change or incident. They should where possible be shared with and carried out in conjunction with the service user, who may be asked to sign them. It is also good practice to share them with any carer and with other organisations involved in the delivery of care or support. Of course, all staff must see them, and they must be regularly shared with staff.

Most organisations carry out their assessments integrally with the development of a care plan, and the value of the assessment process in this is apparent. Some people use essentially one suite of documentation for this, but this tends to cause a focus on needs/risks to resident, sometimes at the expense of consideration of risks posed to others.

The Food Hygiene (England/Wales) Regulations 2005

These Regulations came into force on 1st January 2006.

Food premises, including canteens and kitchens used for the preparation of food to be eaten by the public, must be registered with the local Environmental Health department.

The new Regulations make HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) analysis of food preparation processes an explicit requirement. Each process will require a written analysis which identifies the points at which an error or failure could render the food produced unsafe.

For instance, if you are cooking a joint of meat, failure to cook it thoroughly could allow bacteria to survive the cooking process. A critical control point will therefore be the use of a probe thermometer to establish that an adequate cooking temperature has been reached in the centre of the joint.

Similarly, if sandwiches are stored in the fridge, but the fridge is too warm, fast growth of contaminating bacteria will be allowed to occur. So the critical control point here will be ensuring that the fridge temperature is monitored, and corrective action is taken if it rises above a predetermined level.

A food safety plan will also be needed, which identifies the critical control points, general and specific to particular food preparation processes, and records what they are. Full record keeping, eg training records, temperature measurement records etc will be required.

The general plan needs to cover staff health and training, protective clothing, cleaning, receipt of supplies, storage, pest control, facilities and equipment and avoidance of cross contamination. A simple plan covering the critical control points for each food preparation process will also be needed. Follow this link for a good example of a HACCP analysis: <http://www.technology.org.uk/industry/makhani/haccp.htm>

PERSONAL SAFETY AND TRACKING SYSTEMS

GIVEN THE constant level of concern from staff about their personal safety when out of the office, there has been much interest in the various tracking systems now available. These systems are usually mobile phone based, and allow the user to be located with considerable accuracy. Most of them require the user to "log in" when making a visit, after which the monitoring station will await their log out after a specified time. If it does not occur, the alarm will be raised. Some of the systems also include an ability for the monitoring station to listen in to the user to try to determine the situation.

Satisfaction levels with these systems in organisations which are using them seems to vary widely. In many cases, staff have felt uncomfortable about having their movements monitored, and have not always welcomed such a scheme. The systems which require the user to log in are preferred in these cases. However, disappointingly, the log in systems often have a fairly poor rate of uptake, with the majority of staff only logging in when they are entering a situation about which they have real concerns. The inevitable effect of this is that an incident will occur to a member of staff provided with the system, but no support is obtained because he has not logged in.

Staff in organisations who work in the

more high risk areas are more likely to welcome and use these systems. However, even there, comments suggest that some people do not feel protected by the system. Even in an emergency, response times in practice would be at least 20 minutes – and as one worker said: "How much damage can he do me in 20 minutes?"

It is clearly essential that the staff affected should be closely involved in the decision to use a tracking system. Unions must be formally consulted. Where the system is welcomed by staff, and they are prepared to use it, it is of some value. It is important though, to remember that it is not a complete solution to lone worker risks, and needs to be used as part of a programme of management of these risks and not in isolation.

Can we still use ladders?

There is no ban on using ladders. They will still, in many cases, be the most practical solution for work at height.

Ladders can be used for jobs which are low risk AND of short duration. They should be used only when safer means of access to height have been ruled out on grounds of feasibility or cost.

A ladder could be used for clearing a blocked gutter at first floor level. It should not be used for painting second storey windows. And for jobs between? This must be a risk judgement.

Window cleaners and their use of ladders have been the focus of some attention because of the effect the new Work at Height Regulations are likely to have on their traditional methods of work. Around two window cleaners die every year in falls from ladders, and many more are seriously injured. Always challenge the use of ladders by window cleaners. There are safer approaches than the use of ladders which will be practical in many cases.

Ladders must always be used with due consideration for suitability, stability, condition and user training or experience. Ladder use is involved in a large number of serious or fatal accidents every year.

Remember that employing contractors to undertake work at height does not completely absolve you of responsibility.

In most cases, you should enquire about their intentions if work at height is involved, and requesting a risk assessment for this work will give you a good chance to judge their approach.

Safetywise Ltd – The Health and Safety Partners of Choice for the Voluntary Sector

Since its establishment in 1999, Safetywise has worked extensively in the voluntary sector. Partnerships with organisations large and small have helped the company to develop an approach perfectly geared to the needs and aspirations of the sector.

We will work with an organisation as a whole, helping with the prioritising of and the management of the full range of health and safety risks. We will also work on particular areas of importance for an organisation, liaising with the appropriate team. We have extensive experience in the management of the following risks:

- Asbestos
- Construction and CDM
- Management of Contractors
- Property risks – legionella, electrical and gas safety, safe environment
- Personal safety and lone working
- Work related stress
- Fire safety

- Supporting People
- Office safety and computers
- Travelling for work

The work we complete is unique to the client organisation, originating all reports, policies and risk assessments, whilst always utilising our increasing experience of effective approaches. We seek to empower the organisation, developing the confidence and competence of the management team and staff.

We differ from most health and safety consultancies in that the policies we produce are not ours – they are yours. We will spend time with individuals or teams to find out what approach will work best, whilst of course providing guidance and support on the legal requirements, and drawing on our experience of what works well.

For the main health and safety policy, the aspirations of the organisation, the demands of the law, the existing systems and many other issues can all be taken into account in developing a policy which says what the organisation wants. We will

facilitate discussion and guide you as to the requirements which must be met. In this way, every policy we develop is unique. It is our view that generic policies are most rarely of any value.

We have a particular interest in the health and safety issues associated with the housing of vulnerable groups. We routinely encourage RSLs to include an appropriate commitment to tenant or service user safety as part of their policies, and we seamlessly apply health and safety management requirements across the duties to employees and to other affected groups.

Training

The provision of training is an integral part of our approach. This may be completely informal – the opportunity taken to give a little coaching to an interested member of staff, or may take the form of full day courses with formal presentations. In general, we tend to prefer interactive, workshop style training sessions with an emphasis on developing practical skills and discussing approaches.

One of our most important training initiatives has been our risk

assessment mentoring package. This approach requires the organisation to free their risk assessors (often line managers) for successive periods of time spaced a few weeks apart. This allows us, following a short initial training session, to support and coach the participants through their risk assessment exercises.

Using a variety of tools, we will help the group to plan and carry out all their general and task risk assessments, and also assessments for manual handling, COSHH, work equipment etc, finally pulling together their risk assessment findings as a group of actions to take.

This approach builds confidence and ensures good quality assessments. Most especially, it is geared to make sure that useful results are generated from the exercise, which validates risk assessment as a useful tool. This has been strikingly successful in a number of organisations which had previously failed to make headway with risk assessment.

Email Updates

We send out regular email updates on subjects relevant to the Voluntary and Social Care sector. These are not long winded, boring, multi-subject things designed to take up all of your time on a Monday morning as many seem to be!

Ours are sent out only when we need to share information that is important to you. We stick to a single subject and try to give as much advice as possible. If it is a change in the law, for instance, we will try to interpret what that means for the sector and what you may need to do. To sign up, email: sam@safety-wise.co.uk

Newsletter

pdf versions are available on our website. To subscribe, give suggestions for articles or comment on the content, contact sam@safety-wise.co.uk



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