

港工人健康 中 心 Hong Kong Workers' Health Centre



本計劃由香港公益金資助 This project is supported by The Community Chest





Features

"Is Personal Protective Equipment Suitable?" Examining the Situation in Foreign Countries and Hong Kong

Prevention

 A Summary of the Survey on the Basic Occupational Health and Safety Protection of the Lifesaving and Rescue Industry in Hong Kong

Rehabilitation

• Comparisons of Occupational Rehabilitation Services: Assessing Changes Over a Five-Year Period



Features

02 "Is Personal Protective Equipment Suitable?" Examining the Situation in Foreign Countries and Hong Kong

Prevention

08 A Summary of the Survey on the Basic Occupational Health and Safety Protection of the Lifesaving and Rescue Industry in Hong Kong

Rehabilitation

12 Comparisons of Occupational Rehabilitation Services: Assessing Changes Over a Five-Year Period

Publisher	Hong Kong Workers' Health Centre Ltd.		
Professional Consultant	Prof. Ignatius Tak Sun Yu		
Chief Editor	Sabrina Wan		
Editor	Kay K. K. Lau		
Contact Address	Room 1429-1437, 14/F., 87-105 Chatham Road South, TST, Kowloon, Hong Kong, SAR China		
Contact Method	info@hkwhc.org.hk Tel: (852) 27253996 Fax: (852) 27286968		
Web site	www.hkwhc.org.hk		
Acknowledgement	English version of this magazine is provided by Mr. CHAN Ting Him, Issac		

"Occupational Health" is the publication of Hong Kong Workers' Health Centre (WHC). The purpose of this newsletter is to share our concerns, issues and initiatives on occupational health with the general public in Hong Kong and Mainland China. The information and comments that appear in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the official position of WHC, and WHC will not assume any legal liability or be responsible for damages caused by use of the contents in this newsletter. For those who want to use the contents of this newsletter for their own writings, please quote references to this newsletter accordingly.

Hong Kong Workers' Health Centre@2023 copyright

Features

"Is Personal Protective Equipment Suitable?"

Examining the Situation in Foreign Countries and Hong Kong

Personal Protective Equipment is likely a familiar term to many people. Whether in the medical, cleaning, construction, food service, or other industries, various types of protective equipment such as safety helmets, safety shoes, and respiratory protective devices are used. Personal protective equipment refers to any equipment worn to reduce employees' exposure to occupational hazards¹. While they have limitations and require proper use to be effective, they serve as a last line of defense in protecting employees' occupational health and safety, supplementing hazard elimination, engineering controls, and administrative controls. Hence, the correct selection, wearing, and maintenance of equipment are crucial.



Hazards of ill-fitting personal protective equipment

To some, it may seem unimportant if personal protective equipment is too loose or tight. However, it poses severe risks to the safety and health of the wearer. Firstly, protective equipment needs to fit the user's body shape to be effective. Equipment that is too large or too small cannot fulfill its intended function. For example, an oversized respiratory protective device cannot snugly fit the user's face, leaving gaps between the mask and the face. Unfiltered air

may enter the mask, allowing harmful substances to be inhaled and compromising its protective effect. Moreover, ill-fitting protective clothing can introduce additional risks, such as tripping due to excessively long sleeves or pants, leading to accidents.

Additionally, ill-fitting equipment may reduce employees' willingness to wear it. Equipment that does not fit properly causes discomfort, affecting work performance. Wearing such equipment can slow down reaction speed, reduce

flexibility of movement, and increase fatigue². As a result, employees may be inclined to remove or not use ill-fitting personal protective equipment¹, inadvertently losing the protection of the last line of defense.

Foreign Situation

Recently, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in the United States has proposed new regulations regarding the proper selection of personal protective equipment. In 2017, OSHA modified the general industry standards, requiring that personal protective equipment provided by all industries except agriculture, construction, and maritime industries

must fit the user's body shape³. In July of this year, OSHA proposed to modify the existing regulations for personal protective equipment in the construction industry to align with the general industry standards, explicitly stating that personal protective equipment must fit properly to protect employees from workplace hazards¹. The motivation behind the U.S. government's amendment to the regulations stems from numerous past incidents, such as an accident in 2013 at a used car repair and

sales company, where an employee's forearm was amputated due to wearing excessively long latex gloves that got caught between the power steering pump belt and pulley⁴.

This issue is not limited to the United States. It occurs worldwide across various industries and for both men and women. Healthcare workers in South Korea also face similar problems. A study conducted in 2017 revealed that one of the difficulties in using personal protective equipment was the lack of proper fit. For example, for male healthcare workers with muscular builds, their coverall protective suits could not fully cover their bodies. In addition, female healthcare workers with smaller chins were unable to pass the fit test for N95 disposable medical respirators provided to them, which hindered their immediate participation in medical teams and affected hospital staff deployment⁵. Furthermore, ill-fitting personal protective equipment makes it difficult to protect healthcare workers from exposure to bacteria or viruses in the workplace. Thus, the consequences of improperly fitting personal protective equipment are significant and should not be taken lightly.

The causes of this situation may include a lack of options for different sizes and buyers' lack of awareness of the availability of different sizes in the market. Some companies provide one-size-fits-all personal protective equipment without considering the diverse body shapes of their employees. Manufacturers and retailers also lead to this issue. A study examining products offered by seven mainstream personal protective equipment manufacturers in the United States in 2017 found that only 9% of safety goggles and 12% of safety helmets had sizes beyond the standard options. Even when other options were available, the size ranges were often narrow. For example, respiratory protective devices only offered sizes such as extra large, large, medium, small, without extra extra large or extra-small options. This demonstrates that fewer suppliers provide a wide range of size choices. Moreover, suppliers often provide insufficient information regarding sizes, with over 60% of products lacking size charts for reference. Additionally, standard-sized personal protective equipment is commonly showcased, leading to employees and companies being unaware of the availability of different sizes⁷.

In addition to size, the design itself can lead to ill-fitting personal protective equipment, particularly for female employees who may have a deeper understanding of this issue compared to their male counterparts. In 2022, a survey conducted among 635 Australian women working in the construction industry revealed that the majority of respondents were dissatisfied with the adequacy of the provided personal protective equipment. On a scale of 1 to 5, they rated the adequacy at only 2.6, and the suitability for female bodies at just 2.1. They

highlighted that the construction industry worldwide is male-dominated, with fewer women involved. Most available personal protective equipment in the market is, therefore, designed based on male body standards and is not suitable in terms of both size and design for female bodies. For example, some garments have an overly flat chest design⁸.

Situation in Hong Kong

The problem of ill-fitting personal protective equipment is not only worldwide but also close to home in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Occupational Safety and Health Council (OSHC) collected data from 966 elevator maintenance workers in 2019. Among the interviewed employees who did not use personal protective equipment, 36% of them did not use it because the equipment size was not suitable. Even among the respondents who used personal protective equipment, over half of them believed that the ill-fitting equipment could not provide adequate protection⁹. This shows that frontline workers in Hong Kong are also facing hazards due to ill-fitting personal protective equipment.

Furthermore, similar to the situations abroad aforementioned, female employees in Hong Kong are significantly affected. Most healthcare workers in Hong Kong, such as nurses, hospital cleaners, and caregivers, are women. A local survey found that their personal protective equipment, including gowns, goggles, and masks, is designed based on male body sizes, leaving them lacking proper protection and facing greater risks¹⁰.

As mentioned above, in the United States or Hong Kong, one of the causes for this issue is the lack of options for various sizes provided by suppliers. Even 3M, the mainstream personal protective equipment supplier in Hong Kong, lacks different size choices for certain products. On 3M Hong Kong's official website, out of 44 N95 disposable dust mask products, there are only two options: standard and small sizes. Furthermore, there is no corresponding size chart provided. As the majority of N95 disposable dust masks are imported from the United States¹¹, the standard sizes for European and American individuals may not be suitable for the relatively smaller body size of Hong Kong people. It is also unclear for Hong Kong people how "small-sized masks" are defined and whether they are suitable. Similarly, 3M lacks personal protective equipment designed specifically for women. Among all the protective clothing provided by 3M, both men and women can use them. Yet, women have narrower shoulders and wider hips. Choosing a smaller size may result in the protective clothing being too loose in some parts and too tight in others, which does not truly solve the problem. So, how can one purchase a properly fitting personal protective equipment?

The problem is actually not a recent discovery. As early as 2015, a survey conducted by the OSHC revealed that interviewed electrical workers complained about ill-fitting personal protective equipment, which hindered its use and failed to ensure safety. Nevertheless, the OSHC did not conduct further research, and the Labour Department did not take extensive

action to address the issue. It can be imagined that the problem has persisted from the past until now due to the lack of sufficient attention from the government and society. Simply by looking at the following activities, guidelines, and regulations, one can glean some insights.

In recent years, the OSHC has organized services and activities related to personal protective equipment, such as subsidy programmes for shoe

insoles and fall protection devices, and the release of a poster in 2020 titled "Ultimate Safety Attitude: Wear Your Safety Helmet Correctly". These efforts aim to promote employers' provision of appropriate equipment and encourage frontline workers to wear personal protective equipment. There are however no activities specifically focused on promoting the proper fit of personal protective equipment. Similarly, the Labour Department has issued several relevant guidelines, including "Introduction to Personal Protective Equipment in the Workplace"¹³, "Chemical Safety in the Workplace"¹⁴, and "Guidelines for Selecting, Using, and Maintaining Safety Helmets¹⁵. Although these guidelines mention the importance of employers and employees choosing appropriate personal protective equipment and considering whether it fits and can be adjusted to suit individual body sizes, the content regarding the fit of equipment is limited. Moreover, it does not provide detailed descriptions of the consequences of ill-fitting equipment to raise awareness among readers. Even after the research results from 2015 and 2019 were published, there were no revisions or additional content addressing these issues. Furthermore, the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance, such as the Construction Sites (Safety) Regulations, states that employers need to provide appropriate personal protective equipment for employees but does not clearly define what "appropriate" means nor specify the requirement for equipment to fit the user's body shape¹⁶. These various indications show that the government's focus in terms of personal protective equipment is primarily on the provision and wearing of equipment, and there is not much emphasis on the correct selection of properly fitting equipment.

On the other hand, ineffective enforcement is one of the causes of the problem. Although the law does not explicitly state that personal protective equipment needs to fit the body shape, the fit is one factor in determining the suitability of equipment. Thus, if the Labour Department discovers ill-fitting personal protective equipment during inspections, they can issue notices or initiate prosecutions to strengthen the effectiveness and deterrent power of the law, reducing cases where employers and employees disregard legal requirements. Yet, in reality, the current enforcement efforts are unsatisfactory. A public opinion survey in 2019 indicated that the public generally believes that the Labour Department's inspections are insufficient, leading to frequent accidents and ineffective enforcement¹⁷. Hence, even if the employer does not provide suitable equipment, they may not necessarily be punished by the

law. This fails to compel employers to ensure that employees wear properly fitting personal protective equipment.

III-fitting Equipment Requires Reflection from All Parties

Frontline workers in Hong Kong are unable to obtain the necessary protection and face risks associated with wearing ill-fitting personal protective equipment. Employers, suppliers, and government stakeholders all bear a corresponding responsibility and cannot escape their obligations.

Have employers fulfilled their responsibilities? From an ethical standpoint, they should consider the diverse body shapes of frontline workers and prioritize their safety and health over administrative costs. From a legal perspective, employers must provide "appropriate" personal protective equipment for all employees in accordance with the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance. In fact, there are examples in Hong Kong worth referencing. Leighton Contractors (Asia) Limited consulted with an internal group representing female construction workers and provided women's-size work trousers for all female construction workers on their Hong Kong sites, ensuring that they can work in comfortable and safe protective gear¹⁸. If employees to check the suitability of the equipment and following Leighton's approach, which encourages employee participation in the selection of personal protective equipment and actively seeks feedback, it may help prevent the emergence of numerous accidents in Hong Kong.

Can suppliers provide a broader range of size choices, more detailed size information, and introduce equipment designed to meet different gender needs? While employers have their responsibilities, it becomes difficult for them to provide suitable personal protective equipment for employees of different body types and genders if the supply market does not offer diverse options.

On the other hand, has the Hong Kong government paid sufficient attention and promoted social awareness? In the United States, OSHA has shown significant concern

for this issue, organizing events like the NIOSH Protective Clothing Challenge and providing monetary rewards to raise public awareness of ill-fitting personal protective equipment. They also promote research on anthropometry to assist manufacturers in developing protective gear that can accommodate various body shapes¹⁹. Apart from considering OSHA's measures, the Hong Kong government should consider providing additional support and information for employers and employees, such as methods to determine the required size, helping them make the correct selection of appropriately sized equipment.

If all parties take an extra step and explore every viable direction, it is expected that more tragedies like the 2013 incident where an American automotive worker lost his arm can be avoided. This will ensure that the last line of defense in protecting the safety and health of employees can operate effectively.

References

- 1. United State Occupational Safety and Health Administration (2023). "Personal Protective Equipment in Construction"
- 2. Brisbine, B. R., Radcliffe, C. R., Jones, M. L. H., Stirling, L., & Coltman, C. E. (2022). "Does the fit of personal protective equipment affect functional performance? A systematic review across occupational domains"
- 3. United State Occupational Safety and Health Administration (2017). "Standards Number 1910.132(d)(1)(iii)"
- 4. United State Occupational Safety and Health Administration (2013). "Inspection: 908699.015 Boch H Business Trust Dba Boch Honda"
- 5. Kang, J. et al. (2018). "Difficulties in using personal protective equipment: Training experiences with the 2015 outbreak of Middle East respiratory syndrome in Korea"
- 6. United State Occupational Safety and Health Administration (1999). "Women in the Construction Workplace: Providing Equitable Safety and Health Protection"
- 7. Flynn, M. A., Keller, B., & DeLaney, S. C. (2017). "Promotion of alternative-sized personal protective equipment"
- 8. Oo, B.L.& Lim, B.T.H. (2023). "Women Workforces' Satisfaction with Personal Protective Equipment: A Case of the Australian Construction Industry"
- 9. Occupational Safety and Health Council of Hong Kong (2020). "Survey Report on Occupational Safety and Health of Elevator Maintenance Workers"
- 10. The Gender Studies programme of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (2020). "Reflection on Gender Equality under the Pandemic -Policy Recommendations on the Impact of the Pandemic on Women"
- 11. 3M. (2020). "Quick Reference Guide Disposable Respirators"
- 12. Occupational Safety and Health Council of Hong Kong (2016). "Survey on Occupational Safety and Health Status of Hong Kong Power Industry Workers"
- 13. Labour Department (2010). "Introduction to Work Safety Personal Protective Equipment"
- 14. Labour Department (2009). "Chemical Safety in the Workplace"
- 15. Labour Department (2000). "Guidelines for Selection, Use, and Maintenance of Safety Helmets"
- 16. Hong Kong Ordinance (2023). "Construction Sites (Safety) Regulations"
- 17. Oriental Daily News (2019). "Oriental Survey: Loose Enforcement and Lenient Penalties, Labour Department Tolerates Sweatshop Practices."
- 18. Leighton Contractors (Asia) Limited (2022). "Improving Safety Protection Introducing Women's-Size Pants"
- 19. Pena,M. et al. (2023). "Personal Protective Equipment Fit in the Construction Sector"

The Prevention of Pneumoconiosis Campaign

With the initiation of major transportation and infrastructure projects, construction works such as old buildings maintenance, renovation and clearance projects have increased significantly. However, without the implementation and adherence to appropriate occupational health and safety preventive measures, frontline construction workers become susceptible to occupational health hazards, resulting in injuries and occupational diseases.

To increase awareness about pneumoconiosis (including silicosis and asbestosis) and mesothelioma among frontline construction workers, the Hong Kong Workers' Health Centre and Hong Kong Construction Industry Employees General Union are conducting health promotion campaigns in various districts. These campaigns are sponsored by the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Fund Board and the details are as follows:

Campaign Period:

1st January 2023 - 31st December 2023

Target:

- Frontline construction workers at construction sites, involved in building maintenance, renovation, and clearance works projects, including both current workers and apprentices
- Homeowners or households planning for building maintenance, renovation, and clearance works, along with workers and contractors providing relevant services

Activities:

- "Pneumoconiosis Prevention and Promotion Ambassadors" Training Workshop
- Health Talk on Pneumoconiosis Prevention
- Roadshows at the Workers Registration Service Centre
 and Construction Sites
- Case Referral Service for Pneumoconiosis Sufferers

Organizer:

Sponsor:

肺塵埃沉着病補償基金委員會 PNEUMOCONIOSIS COMPENSATION FUND BOARD

Prevent and Reduce Dust Generation Smart and Health First

A Summary of the Survey on the Basic Occupational Health and Safety Protection of the Lifesaving and Rescue Industry in Hong Kong

Every summer, while the general public hopes to beat the heat through water activities, it is the time when lifeguards, who serve the water-loving citizens, face the highest work stress of the year. Yet, the occupational health and safety issues of lifeguards have rarely received attention from the society. The occupational health and safety of lifeguards does not only affect their own safety and health, but also determine whether they can provide timely assistance to the public in emergencies. Tragic incidents in recent years, such as lifeguards drowning due to their lack of knowledge in scuba diving, failing to rescue drowning swimmers in a timely manner due to inadequate staffing, have revealed the unsatisfactory state of occupational health and safety among lifeguards in Hong Kong.

In view of this, the Hong Kong Workers' Health Centre, the Hong Kong and Kowloon Life Guards' Union, and the Federation of Hong Kong & Kowloon Labour Unions has conducted a survey on the basic occupational health and safety protection in Hong Kong's lifesaving and rescue industry. The purpose of the survey is to provide more comprehensive data to the government, industry, and the general public, reflecting the industry's situation, needs, and concerns. It also aims to propose targeted preventive and improvement measures to enhance the occupational health and safety protection for lifeguards. The summary of the survey results and recommendations are as follows:

Survey Results and Findings

1. Undertaking specialized tasks without proper training, lifeguards may bear safety consequences

The survey revealed that in addition to their basic duties such as rescuing people in danger of drowning and performing first aid, many lifeguards are required to operate a large number of complex equipment. Nonetheless, a significant number of respondents stated that without relevant certificates or prior training they were still asked by their employers or management to operate the special equipment or machinery. For example, approximately 20% and 50% of beach lifeguards were asked to operate heavy equipment such as skid steer loaders and tracked transport vehicles, respectively.

These indicate that employers or management have not fulfilled their legal obligations under the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Chapter 509) to provide necessary training for their employees. Improper operation of these specialized or heavy equipment not only hinders the fulfillment of job duties but also poses risks to the lifeguards themselves. Regarding training on water-related tasks, only about 20% of the surveyed lifeguards considered it sufficient, implying that lifeguards themselves agree that employers or management should provide more training.

2. Lack of basic protective equipment and supplies, exposing lifeguards to inadequate protection and health risks

Lifeguards are often subjected to occupational hazards such as high temperatures, intense light, light refraction, sun exposure, and low temperatures. According to the survey, 70% of lifeguards reported experiencing symptoms of heat-related illnesses while on duty. Even during the low season in winter, 30% of lifeguards in public facilities

reported experiencing symptoms of hypothermia while working. In addition to providing training, the Ordinance stipulates that employers should provide appropriate protective measures and equipment to prevent health and safety hazards. Yet, the survey revealed that 50% of lifeguards working in areas with high temperatures, intense light, and light refraction stated there were no sunshades or sun umbrellas provided at the sites. Furthermore, nearly 60% of lifeguards reported that their employers or management did not provide cooling fans for them in hot environments. The provision of personal protective equipment was also lacking. For instance, over 80% of respondents stated that they were not provided with heat-resistant shoes, and approximately half did not receive clothing, arm sleeves, sun hats, or sunglasses with UV protection. It was even worse for lifeguards in private swimming pools, as they were less likely to be provided with personal protective equipment by their employers. Additionally, about 40% of lifeguards reported being prevented from using their own personal protective equipment by their employers or management.

On the other hand, overtime work was prevalent among lifeguards. In fact, number of lifeguards working over 50 hours per week at private pools was six times more than number of lifeguards working at public pools. They also lacked sufficient rest breaks, as approximately half of the lifeguards in public facilities reported not being given any scheduled rest break during their shifts. Furthermore, safety information was inadequate at the work sites. Over half of the lifeguards working in public facilities stated that no safety information was displayed at the sites. Even in places where safety information was displayed, it often lacked essential information such as water depth, temperature, and weather warnings. These factors contribute to physical illness and discomfort among lifeguards, further impacting the workforce and the quality of rescue operations in the industry.

3. Varying qualifications and performance in the lifesaving industry, posing safety risks for both lifeguards and swimmers in case of accidents

In Hong Kong, the lifesaving industry distinguishes between different roles such as "lifeguards" and "rescuers," each with different qualifications and requirements. Rescuers may not meet the conditions and capabilities necessary to work as lifeguards. If they get injured or encounter a drowning incident during a rescue, it puts swimmers and even their own safety at risk. The Hong Kong Life Saving Society has stated that individuals holding only a Bronze Medallion, which is the qualification for "rescuers," are not eligible to work as lifeguards. Additionally, according to Swimming Pools Regulation Cap. 132CA, lifeguards on duty must hold a valid lifeguard and first aid qualification certificate issued by a relevant association. The regulation also mandates that swimming pools, regardless of whether they are public or private, must have a minimum of two lifeguards on duty at all times when open to swimmers.

But we found that not all surveyed lifeguards in public facilities hold valid first aid certificates. Only about 50% of lifeguards in private swimming pools possess the appropriate qualifications. Furthermore, our survey results revealed that some private swimming pools directly hire individuals with only a Bronze Medallion to work as lifeguards. Perhaps due to staffing shortages, this survey found that 70% of the interviewed pool lifeguards reported they were unable to arrange sufficient staff members at the workplace during opening hours. As a result, 30% of both public and private swimming pools failed to have the required number of lifeguards on duty during opening hours.

During critical moments of accidents, the quality and quantity of the rescue team and equipment are equally important. Insufficient equipment and measures undoubtedly impact the efficiency of rescue operations. Without a sufficient number of qualified and capable personnel, the work cannot even be safely and properly carried out.

Recommendations

1. Providing sufficient information, guidance, training, and supervision to enhance and ensure the capabilities and quality of lifeguards

Many lifeguards were found having inadequate skills to meet the daily job requirements. To address this issue, we suggest that the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) refer to the experiences and practices of foreign government departments. LCSD should provide pre-employment training weeks for hired lifeguards, specifically focusing on specialized equipment operation and scuba diving. These training and guidance will ensure that every lifeguard possesses the necessary skills and fulfill their legal responsibility of employer to provide the required information, guidance, and training to employees, ensuring their safety and health at work. Additionally, there is a need to promote occupational health and safety management responsibilities in private swimming pools to further enhance the awareness and implementation of legal obligations by employers and management. This will provide reasonable basic occupational safety and health protection for frontline lifeguards.

2. Reviewing and identifying the basic occupational safety and health rights of current lifeguards and their legal protection

As the saying goes, "good tools are prerequisite to the success of a job". If we cannot ensure the safety and health of lifeguards, how can they provide the best rescue for swimmers? Employers or management of various types of aquatic facilities must implement sufficient and targeted protective measures and equipment for employees to gradually reduce the risk and impact of various occupational hazards. Engineering control measures include setting up effective barriers to block strong light and UV rays at lifeguard stations and installing electric fans or cooling devices to avoid overheating. On the other hand, sufficient personal protective equipment should be provided to lifeguards, such as clothing, sunglasses, heat-insulated shoes, sunscreen products to protect lifeguards from occupational injuries and to comply with legal requirements.

Moreover, we suggest that the government refer to the comprehensive systems in other regions and promptly establish more precise and industry specific standards, regulations, and

guidelines for employers in the industry. For example, some states in Australia and the United States have clearly defined the weekly or even shift hours of lifeguards, and different break times based on the number of lifeguards on duty. Reasonable duty arrangements should be made based on seasons, job content and others to meet the basic occupational safety and health needs of lifeguards in their daily duties.

3. Enhancing legislation, inspection, and regulations for ensuring the qualifications and proficiency of lifeguards to prevent self-endangerment

Automated external defibrillators (AEDs) have become increasingly common in recent years. Although people can carry out basic operations without relevant training under the voice instructions of the device, early AED assistance by properly trained lifeguards significantly improves the chances of survival for cardiac arrest patients. In countries and regions with more advanced occupational safety and health development, such as Australia, holding an AED certificate is a prerequisite for lifeguards. Hong Kong may consider including a provision in the regulations that requires lifeguards to hold an AED certificate, aligning the professional standards of lifeguards with international levels.

On the other hand, as the existing regulations do not clearly specify the qualifications and division of roles between "lifeguards" and "rescuers", some swimming pools may mistakenly hire unsuitable individuals as lifeguards due to unclear requirements in the legislation. The regulations should therefore further clarify the different roles and responsibilities within the lifesaving industry. The government authorities should also pay attention to the implementation and regulation needed to ensure that the legislation's original intent is fulfilled. If the regulations are not effectively enforced, they become mere empty words. The authorities should strengthen blitz inspections of different aquatic facilities, whether public or private swimming pools, to ensure that there are always enough lifeguards on duty holding valid lifeguard and first aid certificates, thereby implementing and fulfilling the requirements of the regulations.

Conclusion

There is still room for improvement in the occupational safety and health protection of lifeguards in Hong Kong in terms of hardware, software, and training. The government and stakeholders, such as employers, should take action regarding the difficulties and needs faced by lifeguards in occupational safety and health. They should provide sufficient personal protective equipment for different occupational hazards, improve legislation and systems to regulate the quality of the lifesaving industry, strengthen supervision, and provide adequate guidance and training during lifeguards' employment. Only by adopting a comprehensive approach can the safety and health of lifeguards be guaranteed.

Comparisons of Occupational Rehabilitation Services: Assessing Changes Over a Five-Year Period

Introduction:

The implication of occupational rehabilitation lies in the process of returning to work after a work-related injury or occupational disease. Injured workers can return to their work positions within an appropriate time frame through appropriate rehabilitation interventions and social and psychological support. Nevertheless, have the needs for medical rehabilitation and support for returning to work changed for current workers compared to those in the past? For this issue, we have invited a worker to be interviewed to shed light on the relevant changes among workers over the past five years.

The interviewee is a female worker named Ah Yu. 54 years old, she works

as a care assistant in a residential care home. Performing her duties, she injured her left shoulder while lifting a resident. After being diagnosed by a doctor, it was found that she had a torn shoulder ligament and she is currently waiting for surgery. In fact, Ah Yu also suffered from an occupational disease about five years ago due to work. At that time, she worked as a cleaner in an international school and developed a condition known as "tennis elbow" or lateral epicondylitis due to prolonged strain on her right elbow.

Differences in medical rehabilitation over five years

Ah Yu recalls that five years ago, she had limited knowledge about work-related injuries or occupational diseases. When she felt pain in her elbow, she sought traditional Chinese medicine treatment after work. Due to severe pain, she had to take sick leave. When she realized that her condition did not improve, she sought assistance from a Western doctor. After some hiccups, she was eventually diagnosed with an occupational disease at the Occupational Health Clinic of the Labor Department and received physical and occupational therapy as arranged by the doctor. She remembers waiting for about three to six months during that time. And during this waiting period, Ah Yu engaged in some simple exercises to help herself.

When asked about her current treatment, Ah Yu said that after injuring her shoulder, she went directly to the emergency room for consultation. She first went to the general outpatient department and was then referred to a specialist for treatment. She mentioned that the waiting time for the referral to the specialist and occupational therapy was shorter this time, approximately 3 months and 4 months, respectively. Yet, the waiting time for physical therapy was longer. Initially, she had to wait for 1 year, but after waiting for 6 months, she was referred to another hospital for physical therapy.

Impact of inflation: increasing medical expenses

Regarding her treatment experiences, Ah Yu said that there wasn't much difference between the two instances. But she felt that the therapists this time were more attentive and caring about her

condition compared to the past. Ah Yu further mentioned that the medical expenses covered by the Employee's Compensation Ordinance have not increased in the past five years and remain at HKD 300 per day. With the impact of inflation, she pointed out that the medical expenses during these five years have actually increased significantly, and she believed that HKD 300 per

day is insufficient to cover her medical expenses. She gave an example of traditional Chinese medicine treatment. It cost around HKD 300 five years ago, but now it costs around HKD 500 per session. Despite the need to cover the additional expenses herself, Ah Yu still seeks assistance from traditional Chinese medicine.

Coordination of returning to work

The topic shifted to her course of returning to work. Ah Yu recalled that she knew nothing at that time; she only hoped to return to her job after receiving treatment. She mentioned that before returning to work, the doctor prescribed her a "light-duty certificate" so that the employer could arrange her for "light-duty" work and adjust the work process. However, when she handed the "light-duty certificate" to the human resources department, the department not only refused to assign light-duty work, but instead compensated her with notice payment and calculated other amounts before terminating her employer's heartlessness due to financial constraints at home. She was anxious to find a new job. Later, after completing the ERB retraining course in Workers' Health Centre, she found a job.

Feelings of workers

AhYu said that because she had experience and was getting older, she had a better understanding of how to deal with work injury and had additional considerations. After getting injured for this time, she immediately sought treatment in the emergency room at her colleagues' advice. Regarding the arrangements for returning to work, as she currently needs to wait for surgery, she has not considered the details yet. But unlike last time, she now understands her rights. For example, she becomes aware that she can fight for her rights from a legal perspective. In other aspects, she understands that as she gets older, both she and the employer will consider her age. Additionally, the therapist told her that it is not suitable for her to continue in her previous job, so she is planning to switch careers. Apart from age, AhYu mentioned that she thinks the current job recruitment channels are different from before, such as the popularity of online job hunting.

From Ah Yu's sharing, we may see that there are similarities and differences in the needs of injured workers in terms of rehabilitation and support in returning to work over the past five years. The following are some observations and insights from WHC during these years:

Waiting time for medical rehabilitation is still long. How can injured workers seize the golden period for recovery?

Using AhYu as an example. When workers get injured, their most urgent need is timely treatment. Yet, the waiting time for treatment is still significantly long for the injured works due to tight medical resources, although it has improved slightly compared to the past. This causes them to miss the golden period for rehabilitation treatment, which in turn affects their chances of returning to work. On the other hand, the Labour Department has recently launched the Pilot Rehabilitation Programme for Employees Injured at Work. However, the programme is simply experimental and only covers injured workers in the construction industry. So, what should injured workers from other industries do? How can they make the most of the golden period for treatment?

Technological advancements and increased demands

Furthermore, from Ah Yu's account, we may see that injured workers now have more concerns and considerations than before. Besides the usual worries about age and education, they have concerns about computer and information technology applications. Nowadays, many jobs require the use of information technology in job searching or working. For example, workers engaging in cleaning or dishwashing may need to interact with mobile electronic devices. Aged workers or those who are less familiar with electronic devices indeed need relevant training to catch up

with the workplace. Therefore, we should reflect on whether the current training courses meet their needs in this aspect. Are the training courses that focus on understanding the workplace, self-awareness, and soft skills sufficient for their needs? Should we consider strengthening their needs in this area?

Whenever there is a work-related accident, people place their concern primarily on the compensation issues. The importance of maintaining mental well-being and boosting the confidence of injured workers in returning to work is nevertheless often overlooked by society. Social and psychological adjustment plays a significant role throughout the entire process of work injury rehabilitation, as exemplified by Ah Yu's participation in the retraining course. Additionally, the Social Rehabilitation Project for Injured Workers, implemented by WHC since 2020 establishes channels for injured workers to maintain connections with society through a series of social and psychological activities. The project enhances their sense of self-efficacy and confidence, enabling them to independently arrange and prepare for their returning to work. Through long-term observation, WHC has found that injured workers who participate in the Social Rehabilitation Project for Injured Workers become more proactive, comfortable with interpersonal contact and communication, and broaden their daily activities beyond medical treatments. For example, some injured workers continue making mobile phone straps at home after the DIY workshop in the rehabilitation project. They actively bring their creations back to WHC to share and showcase them to their friends and family. To sum up, whether or not the workers can successfully transition from the stage of occupational injury to the stage of returning to work, while medical treatment is undoubtedly important, psychological and social intervention is equally crucial. These two aspects complement each other. In returning to work, injured workers not only need to rebuild their work capabilities but also reestablish interpersonal interactions.

To promote occupational health and safety (OHS) culture and reduce occupational injuries among NGOs in Hong Kong, we are now running a project under the Jockey Club Charities Trust which offers a series of OHS consultancy and promotion services. The project consists of 2 phases:

	Phase I	Phase II
Objectives	To increase employees' participation, knowledge and awareness on OHS issues	To train up internal OHS ambassadors for participating organizations
Details	 Workplace environment inspection and assessment OHS training with industry- specific topics 	 OHS Ambassadors Courses with minimum 9 hours of training and teaching Experience sharing sessions
	 Set up internal OHS Committee Consultancy and follow-up 	 Professional seminars ** Certificates will be delivered to participants who accomplishes all the components of the project
Fees	Free of charge (Fees will be waived upon completion of all components in the project)	

For enquiries, please contact us at 2725 3996 or via email at info@hkwhc.org.hk.

HKWHC Website

HKWHC Facebook

HKWHC YouTube