



OSHA Cracks Down on Healthcare Employers

News

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Howard Mavity was quoted in *Modern Healthcare* on June 25, 2015. The article “OSHA Cracks Down on Healthcare Employers” discussed a recent announcement by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration that it would crack down on hospitals and nursing homes for workplace hazards that aren't protected by formal rules.

Howard weighed in on the announcement.

OSHA's focus on enforcing safe patient handling follows ergonomic standards that were established at the end of the Clinton administration but were thrown out by the second Bush administration before they could take effect. Since then, it's been deemed “politically impossible” to create a formal ergonomics rule, said Howard.

“They're not going to try and that's probably a wise decision, Howard said. “Still, OSHA remains absolutely determined to get ergonomic enforcement rolling.”

Howard believes OSHA has invested in industry campaigns, particularly on safe patient handling and workplace violence, to create an industry expectation that facilities must have procedures and equipment in place to prevent these issues. Given that sentiment, the agency can then prosecute lax organizations under the general duty clause.

An OSHA official told NPR on Thursday that a typical penalty would likely be \$7,000 per hospital, but could be as high as \$70,000 if they could prove administrators deliberately ignored the problem. But Howard doubts the agency will be strict in the initial stages of enforcement.

“It's not clear how aggressively they're going to be able to initially do this because they don't have the manpower,” Howard said.

Healthcare employers shouldn't feel rushed to over-purchase patient handling equipment out of fear of an impending OSHA inspection, Howard said, especially because it seems as though OSHA isn't recommending specific equipment that hospitals must use. But healthcare organizations need to evaluate what risks exist in their work environment so that it's clear that they've taken an initiative to protect their employees.

“It’s time to start obtaining your own professional ergonomist and engaging in your own evaluations and determining exactly what is required,” he said.

Howard said the agency's additional focus on workplace violence makes sense given recent marketing from the agency. States have recently considered bills to protect healthcare workers from violence and OSHA last year fined Brookdale University Hospital and Medical Center for dozens of incidents in which patients and visitors assaulted employees.

To read the full article, please visit [Modern Healthcare](#).

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Howard A. Mavity
Partner
404.240.4204
Email