

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SAFETY CULTURE AND EXPOSURE TO BLOOD AND BODY FLUIDS AMONG PARAMEDICS

To the Editor:—Mr. Weaver and colleagues report an investigation of the association between emergency medical services (EMS) workplace safety culture scores and patient or provider safety outcomes.¹ They indicate that there were no previous studies of occupational safety culture and adverse events among EMS personnel. However, several articles from the National Study to Prevent Blood Exposure in Paramedics² touched upon safety culture and exposures to blood among paramedics and support the general findings of Weaver et al. that EMS worker perceptions of workplace safety culture are associated with provider safety outcomes.

The National Study to Prevent Blood Exposure in Paramedics was a nationally representative survey of paramedics conducted in 2002–2003. For each of five routes of exposure, paramedics were asked how many times in the previous 12 months they had had contact with blood. They were also asked whether they had reported the exposure to their employer. The survey also asked about provision and use of safety devices and personal protective equipment (PPE). Two questions using a yes/no/don't know format were included as indicators of management emphasis on workplace safety culture. These were: "If you did not follow Universal/Standard Precautions, would your supervisor speak to you about it?" and "Is following safety procedures part of your job evaluation?"

The incidence rate for total exposures to blood was statistically significantly lower for paramedics who indicated a greater emphasis on occupational safety culture by answering "yes" to either of the two questions compared with those who answered "no" or "don't know."³ The supervisory behaviors, as depicted in these two questions, had moderate to strong associations with the risk of needlestick and nonintact skin exposure to blood—Paramedics who were not subject to

these management practices had approximately two to three times the exposure risk of paramedics who were subject to them.^{4,5} Other factors related to management emphasis on workplace safety culture, such as provision of safety devices and PPE, were also related to reduced risk of blood exposure. Lastly, we found that paramedics subject to these management behaviors were more likely to report exposures to blood to their employers than were paramedics who were not subject to these behaviors.⁶

The findings of Weaver et al., as well as the survey of paramedics and other literature on workplace safety culture, suggest that EMS workers experience fewer injuries when there is management support for occupational safety.

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