

Case Study

Promoting Safety Representation and Consultation in a Hospital Setting

This case study outlines how the Mercy University Hospital promotes safety representation and consultation through the selection of Safety Representatives and the Safety Representatives Forum



Organisation:

Mercy University Hospital
Cork

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Background

Mercy University Hospital (MUH) is a public acute hospital, with a functioning Health & Safety Committee, supported by a Safety Representative Forum.

The Safety Representative Forum enables safety representatives to meet regularly and work co-operatively to improve employee safety, reduce workplace risks and create better safer working conditions in line with MUH core values (Respect, Justice, Compassion, Excellence and Team Spirit). It acts as a communication bridge between front-line staff and hospital management.

Consultation Arrangements

The Safety Representative Forum is comprised of trained safety representatives elected from a range of departments, including Nursing, Health and Social Care Professionals, Portering, Housekeeping, Maintenance, Administration, etc. It meets every six weeks or more frequently and the Chair and Co-Chair are nominated by the Health & Safety Committee (H&SC) on an annual basis.

Safety Representatives are selected by their colleagues in the workplace. Their role is to represent the employees and to influence safe and healthy workplaces to protect workers' health and safety. Safety Representatives gather feedback from staff during informal discussions, shift handovers, and incident reviews. Specific concerns are brought to the forum for discussion.

The Safety Representative Forum provides an environment for consultation on:

- Risk-protection and prevention measures.
- Risk assessments and safety statements.
- Information on reportable accidents, occupational illnesses and dangerous occurrences, without identifying any individual.
- Information on safety and health measures required under safety and health legislation.
- Chemicals or processes used at their workplace including instruction manuals and safety data sheets.
- Staff training, such as manual handling, patient handling and management of behavioural challenges.

Recommendations for corrective action are developed collectively for onward consideration via the Health and Safety Committee (summary of the issue and proposed solutions). Safety Representatives also share updates with their respective departments to ensure transparency.

Outcomes are reviewed at a subsequent forum meeting to evaluate effectiveness. Lessons learned are documented and shared across departments to prevent recurrence.

Mercy University Hospital Safety Representatives are an important part of the safety management team. Their representative reach throughout the hospital allows for more speedy action on matters that require attention.

The Safety Representatives Forum encourages a preventive approach to occupational safety and health providing for consultation between employers and employees to help ensure co-operation to prevent accidents and ill-health.

The visibility and involvement of Safety Representatives has helped shift perceptions: safety became seen as a shared responsibility, not just a management issue.

Challenges in implementing solutions

The main challenges in implementing solutions have been the normal time challenges of the procurement process (e.g. equipment upgrades, environmental modifications, request for outside consultants).

Critical Success Factors

- The critical success factors has been the training for safety reps, which is repeated periodically and adapted to take account of new or changed environment and the visible support from hospital leadership, which reinforces the Safety Representative Forum's credibility and encourages participation.
- The Safety Representative Forum at Mercy University Hospital serves as a vital mechanism for improving workplace safety through collaborative action. Continued investment in training and leadership engagement is key to sustaining progress and embedding a proactive safety culture.