LONE WORKING

Rosie Nicola

November, 2009

THE WORKSHOP CONTENT

During the workshop we will look at:

- **defining lone working;**
- **the extent of the problem;**
- **the hazards of lone working for RCM members;**
- **risk assessment and good practice advice on minimising the risks inherent in lone working;**
- **steps to reduce the incidence of physical and verbal violence towards NHS staff;**
- **lone working policies.**

DEFINING LONE WORKING

- **The HSE (Health and Safety Executive)**

  "Lone workers are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision."

  These include:

DEFINING LONE WORKING

1. People in fixed establishments where:

- *one person works on the premises;*
- *people work separately from others;*
- *people work outside normal hours.*

2. Mobile workers working away from their fixed base.

DEFINING LONE WORKING

The NHS Security Management Service (SMS)

"Any situation or location in which someone works without a colleague nearby; or when someone is working out of sight or earshot of another colleague."

A list is provided of 18 typical examples in the NHS of lone working in primary care, acute, mental health, ambulance and social care sectors, with no mention of midwifery!

DEFINING LONE WORKING

Many midwifery staff work in isolation. This includes those who work only for a short period of time every day on their own, as well as those who work whole shifts unaccompanied in the community on a regular basis.

THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

- In 2007/8, there were 55,993 reported physical assaults against NHS staff in England.
- In 2008/9, the figure was 54,758 – a 2.2% fall; 1,235 fewer assaults.
- 941 criminal sanctions were applied following cases of physical assault.

THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

Assaults by sector:

- **acute sector – 11,088;**
- **ambulance – 1,240;**
- **mental health/learning disability – 38,958;**
- **primary care trusts – 3,472;**
- **Strategic Health Authorities – 0.**

No specific data for midwifery services.

WHAT ARE HAZARDS AND RISKS?

- **A Hazard** is defined as something with the inherent potential to cause harm or ill health.

- **Risk** is defined as the likelihood of harm or injury arising from a hazard.

- **The extent of the risk** is the number of people who might be exposed to a hazard and the severity of the consequences for them.

WHAT ARE HAZARDS AND RISKS?

Risk assessment is a means of calculating the probability that a hazard will result in definable injury or ill-health, and the action required to eliminate the hazard, or if not possible, to control it.

WHAT ARE HAZARDS AND RISKS?

Examples of hazards and the associated risks include:

- *handling chemical substances* pose a hazard, since there may be a risk of exposure to the chemical;
- *climbing up or down stairs* poses a hazard, since there may be a risk of tripping or falling;
- *use of electrical equipment* poses a hazard since, there may be a risk of electrical shock or burns;
- *lifting people or objects* poses a hazard, since there may be a risk of back injury, or of the people or objects being lifted falling.

THE HAZARDS OF LONE WORK FOR RCM MEMBERS

Hazards include:

- working in a woman's home;
- operating in a socially deprived area;
- operating in an isolated location;
- adverse weather conditions;
- carrying equipment and drugs.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- Regulation 3 of the **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, 1999** places a duty on all employers to carry out *"a suitable and sufficient assessment of all the risks at work".*
- This includes the social, invisible hazards faced by staff, such as those posed by lone working.

RISK ASSESSMENT

RISK ASSESSMENT – THE PROCESS

- STAGE 1 - identify the hazard.
- STAGE 2 - evaluate the risks the hazard poses and record findings.
- STAGE 3 - eradicate the hazard, or if not practicable, control / minimise the risks posed.
- STAGE 4 - devise and agree a safe system of work.
- STAGE 5 - inform, train and supervise staff of the safest system of working.
- STAGE 6 - monitor, review and amend as necessary.

MINIMISING THE RISKS OF LONE WORKING

- Maintaining a log of known risks.
- Carrying out a risk assessment and the necessary arrangements are in place before visits.
- Schedule visits.
- Provide emergency equipment.
- Monitor lone worker movements.

MINIMISING THE RISKS OF LONE WORKING

- Use the NHS violent patient indicator (VPI) process, where the employer operates this. The VPI marker should outline the nature of the risk, and practical advice to lone working staff.
- Share information between different groups of staff.

MINIMISING THE RISKS OF LONE WORKING

- In *"Not* Alone", a guide for the better protection of lone workers in the NHS produced in 2009 by the NHS Security Management Service (SMS), makes the following statement.

MINIMISING THE RISKS OF LONE WORKING

"If there is a history of violence and and the patient/service user, other friends/relatives who my be present at the location is considered high risk, the lone worker must be accompanied by at least one colleague or security officer, or in some cases, by the police."

MINIMISING THE RISKS OF LONE WORKING

- Provide lone working, personal safety and conflict resolution training.
- Ensure staff are aware of, and respect, cultural differences. This will ensure that lone workers do not add to, or exacerbate, the risks faced in a lone working situation.

MINIMISING THE RISKS OF LONE WORKING

Staff should:

- carry out a dynamic risk assessment: a continuous process of identifying hazards and their risks, and taking steps to eliminate or reduce them in a rapidly changing situation;
- place themselves in a position to make a good escape;
- leave immediately, if they feel there is a risk of harm to themselves.

LONE WORKING POLICIES

- All NHS employers should have a Lone Working Policy to inform lone workers about the arrangements that are in place to protect employees, while who is accountable for ensuring the policy is implemented, monitored and reviewed.

LONE WORKING POLICIES

- The policy should be communicated to all lone working staff, through training sessions and team meetings.
- Managers should play a full role in ensuring that the policy, reporting procedures and risk assessments are implemented and monitored locally.

LONE WORKING POLICIES

- The NHS SMS has produced a model Lone Working Policy, and an editable framework for organisations to use.

- See: www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/security