

Preventing work-related skin disease: A qualitative study to identify characteristics of a desirable training program

Bethany Zack, Victoria H. Arrandale, D. Linn Holness

The Issue:

Occupational skin disease (OSD) is one of the most common occupational diseases. Primary prevention is key to reducing exposures. Yet there is a gap in workplace training programs to prevent work-related skin disease.

Information from our OSD research program at St. Michael's Hospital suggests that many workers at risk of occupational contact dermatitis do not receive workplace skin training. For those who do report receiving training, there are gaps in content on use of gloves, skin care while using gloves and early signs of skin disease.

Study Objectives:

To better understand the experience of workers with contact dermatitis and their perspective on

- The workplace training they have received
- Effective and ineffective training programs
- The barriers and facilitators to effective training programs and their implementation.

Methods:

Using a qualitative design 25 participants were recruited from an occupational health clinic.

A semi-structured interview guide was used and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. An inductive thematic analysis approach was used by the team for the analysis.

Contact:

Dr. Linn Holness, Director, CREOD
HolnessL@smh.ca

Participants Characteristics:

All participants had a diagnosis of contact dermatitis and none had received skin training. The mean age of participants was 47 and 54% were male. Primary industries represented included health care, manufacturing and education and 58% were unionized. The mix of workplace size was 25% small, 8% medium and 67% large.

Results:

Past Training Experiences

- First aid and CPR training were viewed as positive because they were hands-on, active, experiential, practical and useful beyond the workplace

- WHMIS was cited as negative experience

Desired Skin Specific Training –

- Content: chemicals used in workplace, prevention, short and long-term health effects

- Methods: multimodal methods – in person, hands-on, demonstration

- Timing: offer early on in employment

- Trainer: differing views on appropriate trainer

Barriers and facilitators

- these related to the training program itself, organizational issues such as workplace culture and the lack of regulatory requirements.

Conclusions:

- Workers desire skin specific training using hands-on methods

- Content should include information about the hazards, prevention and short and long term health effects

- Workers recognize the importance of supervisor support

- Workers recognize the challenge of engagement both at the individual and organizational level.

