



HEALTH & SAFETY AND HOME CARE STAFF

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The GMB - the union for ALL home care staff - has produced this leaflet in response to the concerns raised by our members who work as home care staff. Home carers are under increasing pressure at work from increased workload and rising client expectations.

Furthermore, the wide variety of tasks that home care staff perform including housework, shopping, cooking, bathing clients and carrying out some nursing duties has raised a number of health and safety concerns. The GMB is committed to ensuring that our members are safe at work, whilst providing good quality services for clients. This leaflet highlights the major health and safety issues for home carers, and contains the GMB's charter, which the GMB is using to achieve better standards at work for home care staff.

The GMB Survey

During 1998 the GMB sent out a questionnaire to home care staff in Glasgow. The aim of the survey was to investigate the health and safety problems faced by home carers.

The GMB received an overwhelming response with nearly 600 staff replying to the questionnaire. The replies were analysed by Glasgow University, who produced a report 'Problems Facing Home Care Staff in Glasgow'. The main findings of the report were:

- Staff were very concerned at the decline of the service that was provided.
- Staff were unable to spend sufficient time with those in need, this was a major cause of concern and caused feelings of anxiety.
- A variety of health problems were identified which originated from workplace stress, including a combination of emotional and physical demands.
- Physical health problems were also identified which appeared to be related to the features of the job, possibly as a result of stresses and strains. Common complaints were excessive wear and tear on joints and injuries from lifting clients.
- Emotional distress caused by having to look after severely ill, and sometimes terminally ill clients.
- Home carers found it difficult working in dirty environments
- Some staff found it difficult walking between clients.
- Many staff voiced concern about what was seen as intimidatory tactics employed by supervisors and managers especially over sickness absence.

Following the GMB survey the GMB has launched a charter for home care staff. The aim of the charter is to ensure that home care staff receive decent treatment at work. The GMB will be working to ensure that the Charter is put into practise at work to ensure that all home care staff work in a healthy and safe environment.



The GMB Charter

Protecting Home Care Staff

Stress

"I have four clients to cover in one day, and as I only work four hours a day, I find it quite stressing and tiring trying to get all the work done. The clients are complaining because their time is cut"

43 year old female

"I do not have time to spend finding out about client needs. I am always thinking about the next client, and at what time I am expected at the next job. I find that demanding families get the most care regardless of their needs"

26 year old female

The problem - Home care staff face a number of emotional and physical demands that can lead to symptoms of stress. A number of clients are severely ill and sometimes even terminally ill. This places a great emotional burden on home helps. Job insecurity, budgetary restrictions and an increased workload make this situation worse.

The GMB Solution - The GMB can offer specialist help in dealing with stress at the workplace. We believe stress can be eliminated or controlled through effective risk assessment. We also believe that a client's needs and problems should be made known to staff before they work with the client.

Violence

"I was assaulted by the drink dependent son of a client. He was wielding a screwdriver and blocking my exit from the house. I also have to put up with regular verbal abuse from colleagues"

49 year old female

The Problem - The overwhelming majority of home care staff are women who work alone. The GMB is concerned that in many cases home carers are expected to work in potentially dangerous residential areas. This leaves staff vulnerable to violence, mugging and sexual assault. We are also concerned about the potential risk of violence from clients especially where home carers are dealing with a new client or a client with a history of problematic behaviour.

The GMB Solution - All employers must have a policy for dealing with violence. The GMB will ensure that this policy is put into practise. Measures that employers could consider include two person working in some circumstances, provision of panic alarms, training and counselling for

Sexual Harassment

"I get verbal abuse from clients - shouting and swearing. I have also had to work in the same room as a client who was masturbating"

39 year old female

The Problem - The GMB is particularly concerned about the risk of sexual harassment from some clients, and while home care staff are walking to and from clients premises. The GMB believes that staff should not have to tolerate such harassment from any source.

The GMB Solution - The GMB wants to work together with the Local Authority to ensure that a model policy is developed to deal with all forms of harassment. We also want to ensure that proper counselling facilities exist for staff and want firm action taken against perpetrators.

Manual Handling

"There are some clients that you only visit once a week now. In the past if you visited daily you would be able to pick up shopping on a daily basis. Now I find I am being given a list of a week's shopping. This is heavy and it also means I am usually late for other clients"

44 year old female

The Problem - Many home carers work involves carrying heavy shopping and having to lift clients into the bath. Home care staff can have to repeat these functions many times in each working day. This places a huge strain on muscles and joints and lead to serious long-term injuries.

The GMB Solution - A regular assessment should be carried out to make sure that lifting is not causing injuries to employees and manual lifting training should be provided for all home care staff.

Medical Duties

"We do not get told if we are sent to schizophrenics, male or female, the terminally ill. We don't know if clients have hepatitis, scabies, or any other infectious disease. All we get is a pair of rubber gloves, a plastic apron and a silly wee tabard (overall)"

47 year old female

"I have had to wash a man due to double incontinence. Both me and the man found the very embarrassing. I think this should be a nurses job"

39 year old female

The Problem - In recent years home care staff have taken on extra nursing duties in addition to the other tasks that they are expected to perform. This can entail washing or bathing clients, administering medicine, changing bandages and dealing with clinical waste.

The GMB Solution - Home care staff should only undertake these duties if they have received the correct training. The GMB can offer help and advice to any home carer that feels that they are being asked to take on duties for which they are not suitably trained.

Training

"I have a client who needs to be lifted out of bed with an electric hoist. I have been asking the Department to show me how to use this equipment for weeks. Because I have not been shown how to use it, I have to manually help the client out of bed which is very demanding"

36 year old female

The GMB believes that all staff should receive the necessary training to carry out their work safely. This should include training on lifting heavy loads, dealing with the treat of violence and abuse and working alone safely. We also believe that all home care staff should be insured against any accident or disease contracted whilst working in a client's property.

GMB Commitment

The GMB is working together with Local Authorities to ensure that ALL health and safety law is complied with and that best practise is promoted. The GMB is determined to ensure that all home care staff work in the safest possible environment.

Your Health and Safety Rights

Your employer has a legal duty to safeguard your health, safety and welfare whilst you are at work. Under health and safety law your employer must:

- Safeguard your health.
- Carry out a risk assessment - this means your employer must investigate your workplace and note anything that could cause an injury to you or one of your colleagues. Your employer must then eliminate or reduce the likelihood of that injury as far as they reasonably can.
- Consult with you and GMB Safety Representatives over a range of health and safety issues.
- Provide you with any protective equipment necessary to do your job safely - this equipment must be provided free of charge.
- Ensure that there are policies to protect you from assault and violence.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment do not take place, and that bullies and harassers are severely dealt with.
- Ensure that those who work alone or work anti-social hours are covered by a specific risk assessment to ensure their safety.

These are just a few of the rights that you are entitled to at work - the GMB can help negotiate these rights for you. The GMB can help to make your job safer.

IF YOU ARE NOT YET A MEMBER OF THE GMB - JOIN NOW!!

Independent research has shown that people who are in a trade union are **50% LESS LIKELY TO HAVE AN ACCIDENT** than those who are not in a trade union.

Union/non union	Injury Rate	Actual injuries in one year
Trade Union Recognised	5.3	58,300
No Trade Union Recognised	10.9	181,500

Source: Reilly, Paci and Hall; British Journal of Industrial Relations, 33:2, June 1995

Remember

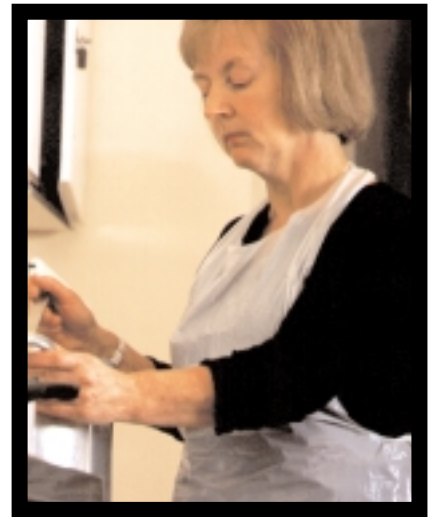
- The GMB is your union, and health and safety is top of our agenda. The GMB is the best union for health and safety.
- We have trained GMB Safety Representatives who can offer advice and help on health and safety problems.
- To back up our Representatives each of our 10 Regions have a specialist Health and Safety Officer. No other union offers this service.
- The union also has a National Health and Safety Department with 4 staff to support the Regional specialists.
- The GMB aims to prevent people being hurt or injured at work. But if something does go wrong the GMB will fight for compensation. Last year we won over £1 Million per week for our members.



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you're safer in **THE GMB!**