



PROVINCE OF KWAZULU - NATAL
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
CENTRAL MEDICO TECHNICAL DIVISION
WENTWORTH HOSPITAL

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ENQUIRIES : Mr. M.J. Havinga	DATE : 30 January 2003	REFERENCE : Sphygmomanometers
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The Hospital Manager / Medical Superintendent
The Nursing Services Manager
The Head of The Stores.
The Equipment Officer.

RE: THE PHASING-OUT OF MERCURY SPHYGMOMANOMETERS.

OBJECT:

To inform Hospital Managers and Clinical Practitioners of the Hazards and latest developments regarding the use of products containing Mercury in Health Institutions.

BACKGROUND:

In spite of a long history of usage and knowledge of the toxic effects of Mercury, Mercury continues to be widely used in Health Institutions.

Mercury theft and spillages are not uncommon and the required precautions are not taken when handling or disposing of this substance. Clinical Engineering Technicians are also placed at risk when repairing this type of equipment and elaborate and costly precautions must be taken in order to comply with the O.H.A.S.A.

FACT:

In terms of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (O.H.A.S.A.) Act No. 85 of 1993 as amended. Mercury is classified as a Hazardous substance and the handling and disposal of this substance is subjected to very stringent controls and regulations. Any person who contravenes or fails to comply with these regulations shall be guilty of an offence. (Details of these regulations may be obtained from your Engineering Manager).

Due to growing environmental concern the use of Mercury is now facing a widespread ban in Healthcare environments such as Hospitals, Healthcare Clinics and Private Practices.

For further reference the following publications can be consulted.

1. Welch Allyn – Anti Mercury report 11 October 1997.
2. E.C.R.I. (Recommendation of the planned phasing-out of Mercury Sphygmomanometers) Health devices April / May 1998.
3. Hospital and Nursing Year Book of South Africa 2001. “In Europe and America the use of Mercury Sphygmomanometers are no longer recommended due to the Safety reasons stated.”
4. The Natal Mercury of 10 April 2001. The Isipingo Declaration: The phasing-out of the use of Mercury products in Healthcare Institutions by the year 2006.
5. The phasing-out of the Mercury Sphygmomanometers was also discussed in detail during workshops and meetings between the Healthcare Practitioners in the Province and the Medical Equipment Replacement (M.E.R.P.) Task Team.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. New Mercury column Sphygmomanometers must no longer be purchased.
2. New Sphygmomanometers ordered should be of the aneroid type and must comply with the CKS 352 Specification. These Sphygmomanometers are available on Tender ZNT 6345/2000-H, Item 36 687 58. The Sphygmomanometer on Tender has been tested by the Central Medico Technical Division and the accuracy was found to be within the Specification. As with any type of Sphygmomanometers the units also requires regular calibration. The Sphygmomanometers on this Tender may be too large for use by the Emergency Medical Rescue Services. A smaller unit that complies with the CKS 352 Specification must then be purchased. (Tender RT 4/2001 ME, Item 202).

CONCLUSION:

The Central Medico Technical Division with the co-operation of the Clinical Practitioners is at present running tests to evaluate several other types of Blood Pressure Measuring Devices. The division is also investigating the possible replacement of Mercury Type Thermometers.

If you have any queries please contact the Central Medico Technical Division.

MR. M.J. HAVINGA
HEAD OF THE INSTITUTION