Protecting European healthcare workers from blood borne infections due to needle stick injuries

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The committee adopted the report by Stephen HUGHES (PES, UK) on protecting European healthcare workers from blood-borne infections due to needlestick injuries. The report, containing recommendations, was drawn up under a little-used procedure which enables the European Parliament to request the Commission to draft new legislative proposals (Rule 39 of Parliament's Rules of Procedure, referring to Article 192(2) of the EC Treaty).

The committee pointed out that every year around a million healthcare workers in Europe suffer injuries when their skin is accidentally punctured with a needle that is potentially contaminated with a patient's blood. The consequences can be serious, including infections from HIV or hepatitis B or C. MEPs believed that many of these "needlestick injuries" which occur in the medical world could be prevented if appropriate measures were made compulsory in medical and veterinary services.

The report pointed out that studies had shown that the use of safer needles together with regular training and organisational measures can help reduce the number of injuries. It added that safer working practices and medical devices designed to prevent accidental needlestick injuries would also produce financial savings. The committee said that the existing European legislation protecting health workers from such injuries had "proved ineffective in practice". It therefore called on the Commission to introduce, within three months, a legislative proposal amending one of the relevant directives (Directive 2000/54/EC on the protection of workers from risks related to exposure to biological agents at work). The report set out the detailed provisions which should be inserted into the directive.