

APPCOG Parliamentary Inquiry: Carbon Monoxide Exposure in Health and Social Care, Risks and Solutions Session One Summary

11 May, 2021 13:40 – 15:30, Chaired by Liz Twist MP

The All Party Parliamentary Carbon Monoxide Group (APPCOG) is undertaking a parliamentary inquiry chaired by Liz Twist MP to explore the health and social care workforce's awareness levels of CO danger, and to establish how health and social care professionals (HSCPs) might be better protected from the risk of carbon monoxide exposure in domiciliary settings. Sponsorship has been kindly provided by all four of the UK's Gas Distribution Networks, the Gas Industry Safety Group and the Gas Safety Trust.

Session one will examine carbon monoxide as a risk in domiciliary settings, looking at how aware HSCPs are of carbon monoxide and what practices are currently in place across domiciliary health and social care to manage risks to health and safety.

Findings & Outcomes

In the experience of the group and expert panel, health and social care professional's (HSCPs) awareness of the risks posed by carbon monoxide is generally very low. The vast majority of people and professionals associate carbon monoxide exposure only with fatality, and are not aware that sub-lethal carbon monoxide poisoning can have chronic, long term health effects. In addition, many in the sector only associate CO risk with mains gas, and not solid fuel or Liquid Petroleum gas (LPG).

When HSCPs do become aware of the risks posed by carbon monoxide via online training, they quickly understand the potential for undetected harm, and the majority will attempt to change their internal working practices to better protect themselves and their patients. However, feedback indicates that these changes are implemented with mixed success, as individuals may not hold decision making power or be able to influence their employer to include carbon monoxide within their current safety practices.

Opportunities exist in HSC for improving carbon monoxide safety; for example through staff training, risk assessments and response procedures. However, these opportunities are not universally or even commonly embraced, even when training is offered free of charge.

To effectively improve carbon monoxide safety in HSC, both a 'top-down' and a 'bottom-up' approach will be required. The top down approach will involve employers, agencies and care providers implementing carbon monoxide safety practices throughout their organisation, making staff aware of these practices, and providing training opportunities. The 'bottom-up' approach will involve staff and HSCPs under taking

training, incorporating the new carbon monoxide safety practices into their work, and educating those receiving services about how best to reduce and monitor the risks of carbon monoxide exposure.

Next Steps

- The steering group for the inquiry will meet in June. The steering group is chaired by Liz Twist MP, Baroness Finlay is a peer member, sector membership includes Nadra Ahmed of National Care Association, Dr Nichola Ashby of the Royal College of Nursing and Lia Brigante of the Royal College of Midwives; in addition sponsoring organisations and industry stakeholders.
- We will conduct a short survey for health and social care professionals, to gauge awareness of carbon monoxide and experience of CO safety practices in health and social care. Assistance with circulation of the survey has kindly been offered by relevant organisations.
- We will seek further primary data via structured interviews with industry leaders and sector stakeholders, to gather intelligence on current regulatory obligations and compliance, considerations for practice change and effective messaging.
- The inquiry will also reach out to service providers to identify examples of best practice in current employment for analysis.
- The findings from the above steps will be reviewed by the steering group on 14 September 2021.
- A second parliamentary session is likely to be held in October 2021 (date TBC). Attendees will be informed of the details of the next session via email from the APPCOG secretariat.

Secretariat Contact

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