

## Welcome!

Welcome to the third issue of **Forward Momentum**, where we will discuss how to optimize, protect and empower your workforce. OHS is all about you -- your business, your future, your forward momentum.

In this issue, we will finish “MSDs, Preventive Health and You: A Three Part Endeavor” with “Part III: Change is Coming—Are you Onboard?” which will discuss what you can do to combat MSDs in the workplace. (p. 3)

In “Are You Ready for the New OSHA?” we will discuss how the Obama administration and OSHA are gearing up for stricter standards for ergonomics and workplace safety. (p. 2)

We will also introduce you to our newly launched website and its exciting new features and content. (p. 4)

Your Partner In Health,



## “Are You Ready for the New OSHA?”

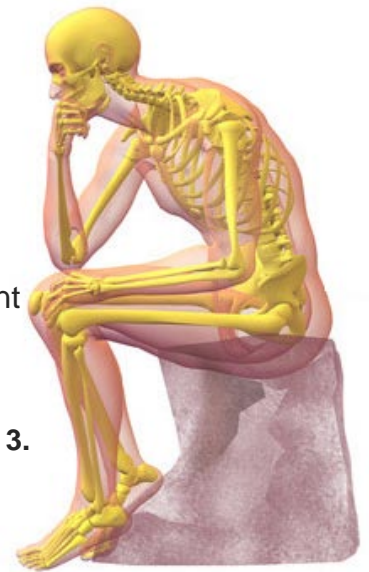
-Bob Patterson,  
Omega Health Systems

For those who haven't been paying close attention, there have been quite a few recent shakeups in our nation's capital. With the new administration, we have seen a different approach to the same old issues. Healthcare reform has taken center stage in domestic debates and we've been keeping our collective eyes glued to events overseas. It seems that with all the distractions, few have noticed some of the big changes at OSHA. Let's rewind a bit and recall the events of just over a year ago.

See “OSHA,” page 2

## Did You Know?...

Without the correct posture, sitting can be anywhere from 40 percent to 60 percent harder on the body than standing.



See page 3.

Check out our new and improved website:

[www.ohs.us.com](http://www.ohs.us.com)

Full of informative articles and presentations, information about OHS and the services we provide, ergonomic evaluation and risk assessment requests and much more.

See page 4



## “OSHA” cont. from pg. 1

While on the campaign trail, soon to be President Barack Obama stated the following:

Today's workers are particularly susceptible to debilitating musculoskeletal injuries. These injuries cost American businesses \$15-20 billion each year in workers' compensation costs. Although OSHA issued a standard based on successful business practices in reducing these costly injuries, Bush and a Republican Congress negated this progress by repealing the standard. As President, I would reinstate OSHA's ergonomics rule and make sure that we create a policy that supports workers.<sup>1</sup>

It doesn't stop at ergonomics. Obama has consistently championed increased employer accountability for work-related injuries and illnesses --whether those injuries are musculoskeletal or not. Ergonomics has gained fame as being the “Mother of all regulations” by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.<sup>2</sup> This moniker speaks to the sweeping changes that would be required of American businesses to comply with the regulation. For this reason, the attention paid to ergonomics has received quite a bit of commentary from politicians and industry watchdogs alike.

Let's rewind a little further. The fight for more rigid ergonomics regulations started long before the Obama administration. Opposed by businesses and business organizations as being “too expensive,” ergonomics was the first target for President George W. Bush; within the first weeks of his administration he repealed the ergonomics standards enacted during the Clinton era. The message was clear: OSHA was NOT going to be the ergonomics policeman under Bush's watch. In fact, during the Bush era, OSHA downplayed much of its regulatory role. While hard and fast safety rules were always in place, OSHA focused on a strategy of collaboration and consultation with employers to improve voluntary compliance with workplace health and safety regulations. Labor advocates opposed this strategy as being too soft and ineffective.

Fast forward to the present. Obama's administration has made it clear that they expect OSHA to change its tune. The kinder, gentler OSHA is being replaced by a stricter, stronger OSHA focused on compliance. The new director of OSHA, David Michaels, PhD, MPH has purported that the strategy of partnering with employers to foster voluntary compliance has simply not worked to improve the condition of the American worker. Of course, whether or not that is true is a matter of heated public debate. Business advocates opposed to regulation vehemently deny this assertion; labor advocates agree wholeheartedly. Regardless of who you listen to, one fact is clear: Dr. Michaels and President Obama are heading in a different direction than the Bush OSHA and the changes have put safety and ergonomics in OSHA's crosshairs.

The stage has been set for this dramatic shift in policy. Obama's 2010 budget calls for a near 10% increase in OSHA's budget, much of which will be used to hire 130 new OSHA inspectors. More inspectors means more aggressive enforcement and more citations. The nomination of Hilda Solis as labor secretary also speaks to Obama's resolve. Secretary Solis is an ardent proponent of strict labor safety standards and regulation. The end result of Dr. Michaels' commitment to compulsory risk identification and remediation, Obama's allocation of enforcement budget, and the oversight of Hilda Solis as Labor Secretary will be a dramatic shift in fiduciary accountability for worker safety to the employer.

The Labor Department's commitment to enforcement will likely focus on the enforcement of risk standards. This signifies a new policy direction. In the past, citations typically arose only in cases of severe negligence that caused harm to workers. Now the scope of citations will expand to all levels of risk, even if that risk has not yet resulted in a worker injury or death. Essentially, employers may be required to reduce risk whether incidents of safety violation have occurred or not. This could spell trouble for employers that have not preemptively identified risk in their workplace.

As a precursor to this shift in focus to risk--and in conjunction with the commitment of OSHA and President Obama to the reduction of Musculoskeletal disorders (MDSs)--the Labor Department and OSHA have proposed to require the reporting of worker MSDs as part of their OSHA 300 log. It is widely understood that this data acquisition project on MSDs would serve as the precursor to enforced regulation to prevent MSDs. In short, it appears that the stage is being set for the reintroduction of an ergonomics standard.<sup>3</sup>

This standard, coupled with OSHA's renewed resolve to enforce violations, and in conjunction with the prevalence of worker MSDs could spell disaster for those employers who are unprepared. Employers will not only be footing the workers' compensation bill because of high MSD rates, but also for the OSHA violation bills. Prevention will pay double in the future.

OSHA will be holding a public forum on this issue, March 9<sup>th</sup>. For more information about the proposed requirements, visit:

<http://www.dol.gov/federalregister/HtmlDisplay.aspx?DocId=23496&AgencyId=17>

<sup>1</sup> Obama, Barak, “Policy Statement to Congress of Industrial Organizations, AFL-CIO,” 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Hotakeinen, Robert, “Obama Could Restore Ergonomics Work Rules,” Sacramento Bee, February 21, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Cisneros, Robert, “Employer Wary of Change in Approach, Focus at OSHA,” Business Insurance, Dec. 14, 2009.

## “MSDs, Preventive Health and You: A Three Part Endeavor”

### Part III: Change is Coming—Are you Onboard?

-Jessie Hochhalter and Rick Spencer,  
Omega Health Systems

Welcome to the third installment of “MSDs, Preventive Health and You.” In this article, we will examine what you can do to get onboard with the new wave of preventive health so that you can combat painful, costly and highly preventable musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). To remind you, MSDs are of the most common human affliction worldwide and account for 49 percent of all absences and 60 percent of permanent work incapacity.<sup>1</sup> Back/neck pain is one of the top five most costly conditions for employees, not only in medical and pharmaceutical costs, but also in productivity loss and absenteeism.<sup>2</sup>

We also have looked at the role of preventive health in the United States, and how the “deal with it as it comes” approach to health simply isn’t working—be it regarding healthcare reform or human resources. Long-term costs will come down and overall productivity will go up with small investments in the wellness of your people.

Even though the government has allocated billions of dollars to preventive health—and even if you are fortunate enough to receive some of that funding—meaningful change will only occur if there is a real and lasting shift in the philosophy of health. Health exists as a spectrum; there is more than just “healthy” and “sick.” Actions must be taken proactively—before injury and disease are too bad to ignore; and there is always room for improvement.

With a keener eye on the causes of MSDs and an overall approach of preventive health, chronic and costly injuries can be avoided and your workforce can thrive.

Cont. →

The problem has been identified; the question is: What are you going to do about it? A comprehensive ergonomics program is a good place to start.

It is important to remember that ergonomics, as an effective preventive measure, is more than just an expensive chair. Equipment plays an important role in workstation safety, but even someone with the finest tools cannot realize success without some skills and direction. A complete ergonomics program should consist of workstation and behavior data and analysis, equipment modification, education and training. Rolling out a complete ergonomic program, or taking small steps in the right direction, will foster results.

In the meantime, here are some principles to remember regarding MSDs in the workplace:

-The equipment should work for you, not you for it; if you have to strain to perform regular tasks, something needs to change.

-Know how to adjust your equipment. You could be reducing, or even eliminating, the benefits of great ergonomic equipment if you are not using it correctly.

-Without the correct posture, sitting can be anywhere from 40 percent to 60 percent harder on the body than standing.<sup>3</sup> It is important to always keep your posture in the back of your mind and take micro-breaks to reduce fatigue.

OHS offers a wide range of services that will help you recognize potential risks in the workplace, give you tools to reduce and eliminate those risks—and provide the skills to keep it that way.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.healthline.com/galecontent/musculoskeletal-disorders>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.workforce.com/section/02/feature/26/39/50/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://ergo.human.cornell.edu/DEA3250notes/sitting.html>

## Our Services



ErgoMED is a unique system of individual risk assessment and remediation including ergonomic evaluations, return-to-work services and software integration in order to reduce costs associated with workers' compensation claims and absenteeism, and increase morale and productivity.



ErgoFit integrates ergonomics into your company's culture through an unmatched system of ergonomic evaluation, education, training and implementation. It is fully comprehensive, easy to roll out and delivers meaningful and lasting results.



Cardinus Software—including Workstation Safety Plus, Healthy Working Plus and Manual Handling Plus—has evolved in line with national legislation and “best practice” requirements to allow for broad-range and low-cost risk assessment and training.



ProjectErgo is the next generation of ergonomic software. Together with Storm Lake Software, OHS has developed this advanced new product which allows you to deliver, collect and manage discomfort and risk surveys for thousands of workers across hundreds of projects, perform advanced ergonomic risk analysis such as RULA, REBA and NIOSH lifting equation and browse the solutions library to effectively reduce ergonomic risk, all with the click of a mouse.

[www.ohs.us.com](http://www.ohs.us.com)

Omega Health Systems has launched its new website!

You can find:

- Articles including, “Ergonomics: What’s in it For Me?”
- Presentations discussing: ergonomics as a core business strategy, how to leverage technology better, materials handling...
- The history of OHS, our team members, the services we provide
- And much more...

Get a free Needs Analysis to see where your risk levels are and what you can do to reduce risk and improve morale and productivity.

You can also request an ergonomic evaluation by filling out the “Referral for OHS Services” form at: [www.ohs.us.com/evaluation](http://www.ohs.us.com/evaluation).

Stop by and see what OHS can do for you!



Your partner in health,



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