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OCCUPATIONAL FATALITIES CHARACTERIZATION (2006-2008)

Introduction

Fatal work accidents, defined as sudden and unpredictable events, suffered by workers on the job site during working hours and which pertaining death occurs up to one year after the incident, are presently primary concerns of every occupational safety promotion policy. This issue involves the daily activities of the Government, the companies themselves, the workers and social partners. Being that the Portuguese legislation predicts a forensic autopsy in case of an immediate death caused by a work accident (Law n. 45/2004, 19th August) and despite having noticed a significant decrease in the rate of such accidents during the last few years (ACT – “Autoridade para as Condições de Trabalho” – Statistics of 31/07/2009), it is still fundamental to promote the awareness of workers, employers and such others, on the importance of occupational safety.

Material and Methods

The authors conducted a retrospective study of 979 autopsies performed, from January 2006 until December 2008, at the Forensic Pathology Department of the Centre Branch of the National Institute of Legal Medicine, considering all cases of occupational fatalities' victims. Data were analysed according to sex, age, nationality, professional group, circumstances, cause of death, post-traumatic survival time and the results of toxicological ancillary investigation. The incidence rate during this period was compared with a similar study conducted in this same Department in the years 2001-2005.

Results

In the aforementioned period, 45 cases of occupational fatalities were found (4,6% of the total autopsies), 44 (98%) of which concerned male individuals and 1 case (2%) a female worker. There was a peak of incidence in the range of 50 to 60

years old (33%) and the average age was determined as 43,2 years (DP+-14,6). The greater number of victims was Portuguese (90%). As for the professional group, the most accident-prone were those of manufacturing industry (28%) and construction industry (20%) sectors. The most common event was fall from a structure (35%) and the majority of deaths was due to traumatic injuries (75%). Toxicological ancillary analyses disclosed ethylic alcohol in blood samples from 8 cases (18%), 6 of which were above 0,5mg/dl (13%); such analysis were not carried through in 40% of the cases in which the victims remained hospitalized more than one day. In 17 cases (38%) the workers died immediately after the event.

Discussion and Conclusions

Considering the achieved results and having compared them to the national statistics of the ACT, it appears that the measures lately adopted by the current and former government entities as a means of preventing occupational hazards and risks – making of the “White Book of Companies Prevention Services” (1999), approval of the Statutes of IGT – “Inspeção Geral do Trabalho” (Law n. 102/2000, 2nd June), control of the implementation of labor regulations, opposing undeclared work, strengthening of the linkage and performance of different inspection services, promotion of systematic campaigns of specialized training, aiming to minimize and avoid work accidents – are having the anticipated results.

The awareness of employers and workers, resulting from knowledge, concern and the advantages of occupational safety, may have contributed to this decrease.

It is hoped that the recent revision of the Labor Code (Law n. 105/2009, 14th September) with the publishing of the new procedure regime, which is to be applied to labor-related offences (Law n. 107/2009, 14th September), will lead to a new decrease in deaths related to work accidents within the next few years, so as to bring the national rates closer to the European standards – according to the “National Strategy for Occupational Health and Safety – ACT, April 2008”.

References

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