

## **Respect the Needle**

*by Dennis J. Ernst*

It sends chills down your spine. It changes your life, sometimes forever. It can plunge you into an abysmal depression, thick with uncertainty, doubt, despair and a gut-wrenching anxiety that consumes every shred of hope for months on end that you'll ever be able to smile without forcing it again.

Not one person who knows will ever look at you the same again. Not your friends, not your family, not your spouse. Although some will come closer to comfort you, some will distance themselves from you in ways that make you feel like a leper who ought not to be touched.

All this because you thought needlesticks were something that happened to other people. You have been drawing blood without an injury for a long time; your technique has been perfected. You are so comfortable with the procedure that you could do it without even thinking about it; then one day you did. Now you can't sleep at night, wondering if there's a virus inside you that you can't stop.

Healthcare workers who respect the needle don't know what this feeling is like. They know the needle is deadly; they won't even recap an unused one with two hands just because they know that if they do, they might allow themselves to do it with a dirty one someday.

Healthcare workers who respect the needle know that every minute of every day, two other healthcare workers get stuck with contaminated needles. At the day's end, over 2,700 other healthcare workers will lose sleep.

Healthcare workers who respect the needle, carry sharps containers to the bedside; they talk as if they are drawing blood absent-mindedly, but their focus is intense and unwavering until the needle is gone for good; they use gloves every time; when drawing with a syringe, they pierce the stoppers without holding the tube with the other hand; they sleep soundly at night.

### **Respect the needle!**

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