OH SNAP! – A BROKEN WRIST AT WORK

Disclaimer: This case study was prepared by Laurel Pinto under the supervision of Dr. Frances Tuer, DeGroote School of Business, solely for the purpose of discussion. While the injury in the case actually took place all details of person(s) and organization(s) have been disguised.

**Introduction:**

Melanie Morris was shocked. She hadn’t realized there was spilt beer on the floor until she was face-down on the ground in a puddle of it. She slowly got to her feet and looked around the bar where she worked to figure out what had happened. There was a large puddle on the floor which she hadn’t noticed due to the typical dimly lit lighting of the bar. Melanie went to go get a ‘wet-floor’ sign and she went back to work but she noticed a sharp, stabbing and constant pain in her right wrist. She tried to shake it off and push through the pain since she had another five hours in her shift, but it was starting to become unbearable.

**Who and Where:**

Melanie had worked at Roger’s Pub part-time for two years, bartending and waiting tables while she was at university. This was only her second job but she learned quickly how to make drinks and how to deal with serve customers respectfully yet efficiently to maximize her tip revenue. Her boss and the owner of the pub, Roger Remington, was always in the kitchen making food and was a constant supervisory presence. Since he owned the pub, he encouraged employees to lie about workplace injuries and state that they happened at home, so he wouldn’t be investigated or have to pay any injury premiums. Even thought she knew what Roger said to do is illegal, Melanie wasn’t sure if she should break the workplace norm of not by reporting workplace injuries. She injured herself in a previous instance when she was cutting lemons and cut open her hand and reported it to her doctor. When Roger had gotten the paperwork from WSIB, he was furious with her for reporting the incident.

**Background on this type of injury:**

Under clause (d) of Regulation 834, a ‘critical injury’ is defined as a broken arm or leg. This includes the wrist, hand, ankle or foot but does not include fingers or toes (Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2012). Broken bones occur when there is more force used on the bone than the bone can withstand (McGurgan, 2016). Broken bones can happen for a variety of different reasons such as motor vehicle accidents, slip and fall accidents or a fall from a height (McGurgan, 2016). More specifically, broken wrists can happen when someone puts their arms out to brace their fall, it is this impact that breaks the bones in the wrist (McGurgan, 2016). Factors such as old age or bone decalcification can put bones at a higher risk for breakage (McGurgan, 2016). Broken bones are the second most common injury among Canadians at 17% of injuries caused to people aged over 12 years old in 2009 and 2010 (Billette & Janz, 2015). Working-age adults experience fewer incidences of broken bones at 14% whereas the seniors and adolescence have rates of 26% and 21% respectively (Billette & Janz, 2015). In a 2004 study, every month in Nova Scotia there were 31 broken bone accidents that happened in the workplace (Workers’ Compensation Board of Nova Scotia, n.d.).

Although wrist fractures have no impact on mortality, wrist fractures impact functional independence (Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health, 2012). Also, delay in diagnosis and treatment of a fracture results in chronic pain, reduced the quality of life and permanent damage to tissue (Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health, 2012). Fractures happen most often to workers in agricultural, mining, construction and manufacturing sectors (Barrett, 2018). Falls at common across all occupations and sectors but the manufacturing sector accounts for 16% of same-level slip and fall accidents (Billette & Janz, 2015). To minimize fractures at work, employers and employees must remain vigilant in the work environment to identify hazards and report them to the health and safety committee (Osteoporosis Canada, 2012). Also, an employee should maximize their bone density by consuming enough calcium and protein, exercise and vitamin D supplements (Osteoporosis Canada, 2012). Organizations should empower their workers to refuse unsafe work and use safety equipment, such as the wet-floor sign, wherever necessary (Osteoporosis Canada, 2012).

**What to do next?**

Melanie didn’t know what to do. Her wrist was very painful but she didn’t want to go home and not make as many tips for the day. She also didn’t want to upset her boss by having to go to the doctor because of a workplace injury. She knew that he would get angry and she didn’t want to lose her job because of it. She really needed the job in order to save money for school. But her wrist was hurting badly and she didn’t know if she’d be able to perform her job well anyways because of it.