

National Youth Safety Essay Scholarship Contest Winner

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It was my third week as a volunteer at a children's medical center when I had been asked to accompany a couple of kids in the dialysis unit. A six-year-old boy, who had kidney failure, began to give me a synopsis of his eventful week as the nurse hooked him up to the clunky machine. I was accustomed to working with kids in the hospital that summer, but this experience made me realize the dangers of workplace hazards and injury. Many assume that hospitals are one of the safest places inhabited by reliable healthcare professionals and staff. The truth, however, is that there is more potential for injury and safety hazards to occur in a medical setting than in the comfort of your own home.

The previous year in my biomedical sciences course, I had been introduced to PSHA. "Believe me," my instructor insisted, "y'all will be glad to receive your certification cards!" But we didn't get it. Why should we sacrifice 10 hours of our packed schedules to complete this course? What will it teach us that we don't already know? We reluctantly embarked on the first of many modules in half-hearted acceptance that our certification will make a difference. Within the course of a month, I walk out of my classroom with my pocket-sized credential. Behind the laminated paper was a reminder of my new knowledge. I proudly tucked the card into my wallet and took a brief moment to reflect on what I had learned about workplace safety. I acknowledged my new role as an OSHA credentialed student and my card sealed my promise to keep my environment safe. I wondered when I would ever need to use my card.

One year later, I stand before a young boy who is undergoing kidney dialysis. As I make small talk with him, I take a second to scan the room. Immediately, I notice an intern start to enter without any PPE. Without thinking twice, I prompt him to stop, exit the room, and put on gloves and a clinical gown. I may or may not have saved any lives that day, but I know that contact with bloodborne pathogens can be fatal. Medical practices should be kept as safe as possible for patients and workers. Accidents caused by something as preventable as wearing proper PPE are the result of ignorance – something that OSHA is working to eliminate by educating. 10 hours of my time might give another a lifetime. As I continue my journey up through the biomedical field, I will continue to apply my knowledge to keep my workplace safe because now I know that my OSHA card can, indeed, make a difference.