Needlestick Injuries Policy

At the November 15 meeting of the University Council, Ian Musselman, a graduate student in Biomedical Graduate Studies (BGS), noted that there has been some confusion regarding where students should go for emergency care if they are injured in a lab. This prompted us to convene a working group of administrators who are directly responsible for student health and safety at Penn to explore the issue and report back to me.

The staff group consisted of Dr. Amy Behrman (HUP Occupational and Environmental Medicine), Dr. Evelyn Wiener (Student Health Service), Matt Finucane (Environmental Health and Radiation Safety), Max King (AVPUL), Sean Burke (Office of General Counsel), and Rob Nelson (Provost’s Office).

The group has concluded that Penn does indeed have a clear policy regarding non-life-threatening student lab injuries. These include needlesticks, minor burns, exposures to pathogens, and sprains or other physical injuries.

Faculty and staff injured in a lab go to the HUP-Occupational Medicine clinic, but students go to Student Health Services, in Penn Tower on S. 34th Street. In order to maintain a clear and consistent protocol, students injured in a lab should always go to SHS, the same place they would go if injured in their residence, in a classroom, or in the gym.

The only exceptions to this policy are as follows:

- If SHS is closed, students go to HUP Emergency Room. This is consistent no matter where the injury occurs.
- Medical students on rotations who suffer needlesticks and students working with Vaccinia (smallpox) must be treated at HUP-OM.

We have taken several recent actions to improve the communication and implementation of this policy.

- SHS has improved its communication with HUP-ER in the last 6 months. Via computer, SHS receives information about Penn students admitted to the ER during the times SHS is closed. SHS staff members then follow up with the students.
• The Office of Environmental Health and Radiation Safety (EHRS) and SHS are working to improve communication with Biomedical Graduate Studies (BGS) students by asking for a greater role in their orientation programs.

• Penn is also developing a new web-based Learning Needs Assessment tool that will direct members of the University community to training programs to improve the delivery of safety information, including where to go to be treated for injuries.