



SUB-COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS OF
TRAINING AND WATCHKEEPING
39th session
Agenda item 11

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ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Seafarers' health awareness training

Submitted by the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA)

SUMMARY

Executive summary:	This document provides information and guidance to raise awareness among seafarers on issues related to their personal health
Action to be taken:	Paragraph 4
Related documents:	None

1 One of the aims of the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA) is to encourage and facilitate education and training in issues related to maritime health. In this context, IMHA recognizes that action to safeguard maritime health rests with international bodies such as the IMO, ILO and WHO as well as national maritime administrations.

2 IMHA and the International Committee on Seafarers (ICSW) have been working towards reducing the risks relating to the spread of illness and promoting healthier lifestyle amongst seafarers. To this end, ICSW has developed the Seafarers' Health Information Programme (SHIP) to raise awareness within the seafarer community. The following topics have so far been covered by SHIP:

- .1 food safety;
- .2 physical fitness;
- .3 travel safety;
- .4 healthy diet;
- .5 spread of illness;
- .6 obesity; and
- .7 HIV/AIDS/STI.

SHIP health awareness material can be seen at www.seafarershealth.org.

3 The outline of a proposed eight hour health awareness programme for inclusion in seafarer training is set out in the annex. The aims of the programme are to:

- Raise awareness of the health problems that may arise in seafarers
- Encourage seafarers to safeguard their own health and that of those they work with by healthy lifestyles and the avoidance of risks to their health

- Help secure a fit and efficient maritime workforce free from health problems that will lead to loss of skills by early termination of careers at sea

ICSW and IMHA wish to share this programme with the international shipping community and would invite the shipping industry to use this programme to raise awareness amongst seafarers on matters related to their personal health. IMHA is ready to undertake further work, with support from others, to specify detailed learning objectives and to develop learning and teaching material to meet them.

Action requested of the Sub-Committee

4 The Sub-Committee is invited to consider the above information and decide as appropriate.

ANNEX

SEAFARERS' PUBLIC HEALTH AWARENESS PROGRAMME

1 TIMETABLE

The course could be completed in a single day, as detailed below, or included as part of the training programme over a longer period. Six sessions of forty-five minutes are suggested with additional time for introductions, discussions and closure or assessment.

2 THEMES FOR TRAINING SESSIONS

The content of each session should be targetted at ensuring that there is awarenesss of the need for personal action and be conducted using a mix of class teaching, consideration of examples and discussion. Material such as that from the SHIP programme can be used to support teaching. The content may need to be modified to reflect health problems and social norms in the country in which it is used. As the SHIP programme publishes new material there will be scope for adding additional sessions.

.1 Food Safety

- .1 Food safety depends on handling, preparation, and storage of food in ways that prevent foodborne illness.
- .2 To understand and maintain good food hygiene, all seafarers need to be aware of procedures for food handling, safe storage, preparation and serving of food, galley hygiene and personal hygiene.
- .3 Prevention is the major factor in the reduction of foodborne diseases. The contribution of simple measures such as soap washing of hands followed by use of a paper towel has been shown to reduce surface bacterial load/contamination by 98%. Such personal contributions need to be emphasized.
- .4 Contamination of food is a frequent cause for the spread of diseases on shore and at sea. Even in the most developed countries, foodborne diseases are common. Most, if not all of these illnesses, can be prevented by thorough safe food handling by those concerned with the transport, storage, preparation and serving of food.
- .5 To maintain food safety standards it is necessary for all seafarers to understand the principles for preventing foodborne infections and their personal contribution to this.

.2 Physical fitness

- .1 Physical exercises can improve mental and physical health. The benefits of exercise include improved cardiovascular endurance, muscle strength and flexibility. Regular exercise improves heart and lung function, giving greater reserves for use in the event of emergencies demanding physical

exertion. It reduces the risk of serious long-term illnesses such as high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke; common causes of early termination of seagoing careers. Other benefits from stretching and strength training exercises are also important. Such exercises can maintain or improve balance, muscle strength, and overall function. Exercise can also help alleviate stress and increase productivity.

- .2 The scope for physical exercise while working at sea is more limited than on shore. Ways of maintaining and improving fitness within the confines of a vessel need to be reviewed and discussed. The long-term benefits from staying fit should be fully appreciated by participants:
 - .1 improves chances of living longer and living healthier;
 - .2 helps protect from developing heart disease or its precursors, high blood pressure and high cholesterol;
 - .3 helps protect from developing certain cancers, including colon and breast cancer;
 - .4 helps prevent or control type 2 diabetes (adult-onset diabetes);
 - .5 helps prevent arthritis and may help relieve pain and stiffness in people with this condition;
 - .6 helps prevent loss of bone strength (osteoporosis); and
 - .7 controls weight.
- .3 Seafarers can have opportunities for an active lifestyle while at sea if it does not already form part of their job. Jogging, climbing stairs, use of stationary bicycles and other gym equipment is often possible and competing against personal performance or that of other crew members can add incentives. The Master and indeed all other crew members can have an important role in motivating people to participate in physical exercise and in organizing events and competitions.

.3 Travel safety

- .1 The maritime industry relies on a system of periodic health checks, vaccinations and compliance with international health regulations to prevent illness at sea, but the preparation for a voyage by a seafarer is also partly their responsibility. Seafarers as travelers are exposed to health risks in places where these differ from their home State. They also share the risks of every traveller by being in unfamiliar environments without reliable guidance on the safe behaviour patterns needed to avoid local risks.

- .2 Through education and information, seafarers need to be knowledgeable about the risks in areas they will visit, the prevalent endemic diseases and the ways of avoiding these including the vaccinations required and any prophylactic medication recommended.
- .3 Unfamiliar and sometimes dangerous medications may be freely available when visiting other countries and the standards of health care may vary widely. In addition, procedures such as tattooing or cosmetic therapies may be conducted with lower standards of precautions. It is important that all seafarers are aware of these risks and minimize their exposure to them.
- .4. Carriage of medications to other countries may lead to major legal problems. If a seafarer is under treatment it is essential to have medical documentation indicating that the medications carried have been prescribed for the treatment of illness.
- .5 The golden rules for safe travel need to be understood:
 - .1 board a ship only if in perfect health;
 - .2 never travel if you feel sick, especially if you are running a fever;
 - .3 some seafarers have to take a flight to reach a port; is so, they need to be aware of the risks of long haul flying and what precautions to take before, during and after the flight;
 - .4 seafarers need to know how to protect themselves from climatic extremes encountered during travel to a ship or while at sea - from the sun, from heat stroke, from the cold and from being frostbitten; and
 - .5 use alcohol with care in unfamiliar surroundings. It may lead to other forms of risk-taking, such as casual sex encounters as well as to breaches of local laws.

.4 Healthy diet

- .1 Healthy and nutritious food is essential for maintaining good health. Healthy eating involves regular and timely meals of balanced nutritional content. A balanced diet with good food habits is essential for a healthy life as good dietary habits can promote health and reduce risk of major chronic diseases.
- .2 There have been major advances in our understanding of the connection between diet and health relating to:
 - .1 weight control and physical activity are as important as the food we eat;

- .2 protein, carbohydrates, fats and minerals are required in proportion to age and lifestyle;
 - .3 saturated fat intake should be limited. The latest advice recommends getting between 20% and 35% of daily calories from fats and recognizes the potential health benefits of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. Unsaturated Fats are found in olive, canola, soya, corn, sunflower, peanut, and other vegetable oils, as well as fatty fish such as salmon;
 - .4 sugar intake should be limited and starches, especially from whole grains, are better sources of carbohydrates;
 - .5 full cream milk should be drunk in moderation. Skimmed and partially skimmed milk help to reduce the intake of fats;
 - .6 fruits and vegetables protect against a variety of diseases; they add fibre to the diet, with benefits for digestion and for protection from intestinal diseases;
 - .7 fish and poultry are important sources of protein, and are preferable to red meats and processed meat products as they are lower in saturated fats. Eggs are a good protein source but should be eaten in moderation because of their fat content. Nuts and legumes are also excellent sources of protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals;
 - .8 sufficient salt is needed to meet the requirements for sweating in hot conditions but elsewhere the addition of salt to food can increase the risks of high blood pressure and subsequent heart disease;
 - .9 building bone and keeping it strong requires calcium and vitamin D as well as exercise. Low fat milk products are good sources; and
 - .10 a diet high in fats, sugars, red meats, salt and refined carbohydrates is unhealthy. Many of these ingredients are hidden in foods such as pies, cakes, sweets and soft drinks. Check the labels!
- .3 It is impossible to advocate particular diets. Seafarers need information on diet in order to make better choices about what to eat and to harmonize this with their daily pattern of exercise and any weight control requirements.

.5 Spread of illness

- .1 A recently released literature review has identified over 100 disease outbreaks associated with ships since 1970. Such outbreaks are of concern because of their potentially serious health consequences and high costs to the industry. Shipping also has the potential to carry illness from country to country and to expose groups of people to forms of infectious disease to which they are susceptible.

- .2 Seafarers need to understand how infectious disease can be spread and the ways in which spread can be prevented. The main routes of spread are:
 - .1 inhalation of infections into the nose and lungs (tuberculosis);
 - .2 transmission on hands, door handles, etc. (colds and other viral infections);
 - .3 skin contamination – especially where the skin is damaged (wound infections);
 - .4 in blood and other body fluids (some forms of hepatitis and sexually transmitted disease);
 - .5 by insects – both bites (malaria) and passively by transfer from an infected source to a susceptible person or growth medium (cockroaches spreading food infections);
 - .6 by food (covered in session 1); and
 - .7 in water. This includes both infections from water contaminated with sewage and from organisms such as the cause of legionnaire's disease (a form of pneumonia) that grow in water systems.

Each has different requirements for prevention. These mainly rely on hygiene but this may be supplemented by immunization or by preventative medicines in the case of malaria. All seafarers need to understand their personal responsibilities for helping to prevent spread.

- .3 Seafarers should also be aware of risks of contracting illnesses that are endemic in certain parts of the world. These diseases include Malaria, Tuberculosis, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, Yellow Fever, Avian Influenza, Dengue, Hepatitis, etc.
- .4 Preventative and control measures are required on board all vessels to ensure that there is proper handling of food (session 1), adequate and proper disposal of wastes, proper sourcing disinfection and storage of potable water. The seafarer must guard against being bitten by rats, ticks, mosquitoes, fleas and should also understand the need to wear protective clothing and use of an insect repellent in certain situations.
- .5 Port health and quarantine procedures and their place in preventing the spread of disease should also be discussed in general terms.

.6 Obesity

- .1 Obesity is a serious condition and has become a major public health issue because of the increase in diseases such as heart conditions, diabetes, sleep disorders and arthritis to which it contributes. More people are overweight

today than ever before, and obesity is directly related to diet and lifestyle (session 4). Imbalance between the energy intake and output is the most important cause of obesity. Obesity is determined by measuring body weight and fat. The body mass index (BMI) is one commonly used method used to measure it.

- .2 Serious levels of obesity will also make a seafarer incapable of performing all their normal and emergency duties and so may lead to unfitness for work at sea.
- .3 Control of body weight is largely a matter for the individual who should understand the need to 'count calories' and eat foods such as fruit and vegetables that are filling and nutritious without being major sources of calories. Help can be provided by shipmates and doctors. The size of portions can be just as important as their contents! The diet eaten both while at sea and on leave needs to include foods that can be satisfying without leading to gain in weight.

.7 Sexually transmitted disease (STD) including HIV and AIDS

- .1 Prevention of STD can be by abstention, use of safe sexual practices or by barriers such as condoms. Preventive measures are likely to be ignored where alcohol and sexual opportunities are present together.
 - .2 All seafarers need to understand how to take precautions to avoid infections, which can be disabling in the short term or, as with syphilis and HIV, lead to serious and potentially life-threatening conditions.
 - .3 Understanding the symptoms of each condition helps to ensure that treatment is obtained at the earliest opportunity and it is important for everyone to recognize that the presence of symptoms as well as in some cases a past infection will mean that the person has the potential to infect others and so needs to avoid further sexual contact until they have been advised that it is again safe, with or without additional precautions.
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