

**Workplace Injury: The case of an employee with chronic pain**

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## **Workplace Injury: The case of an employee with chronic pain**

### **The history of the organization:**

Beis Brunch is a well-known Mediterranean restaurant in Eastern Ontario. Beis has been operating for 11 years, serving their customers with authentic Mediterranean breakfast and lunch food. The organization has five restaurant locations and approximately 100 employees working in both the restaurants and warehouse. The positions at the restaurant differ from the positions at the warehouse. In the restaurants there are servers, cooks, cashiers, managers, and supervisors. The warehouse is where all the preparation takes place. This involves, the cooks who specialize in preparing the spices, marination, and butchers. The head office for Beis also is located at the warehouse which has the department of the Manager of the commissary, Assistant manager, HR, Accountant, and Marketing specialist.

The day-to-day activities for the employees at the warehouse involve receiving supplies and inventory. Butchers use machinery for cutting meat which can be hazardous. Marination and spice preparation requires workers to weight spices and place them in bags for the butchers to use. This task often requires workers to mop and clean surfaces consistently to avoid injury. Employees must wear uniform, hairnet, and non-slip shoes to avoid injury and to ensure safety.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Beis laid off some workers between 2020-2021 due to the restrictions causing Beis to close dining in resulting with a decrease in sales. After the restrictions were removed in 2021, Beis has hired more servers, cooks and warehouse workers and has been looking to hire a public health specialist who will manage the company's safety policies.

### **Description of the incident:**

Melanie Stewart is a 28-year-old recent Public Health graduate from the University of Toronto. She specializes in health inspections and is proficient with developing and managing safety policies for companies. She has been recently hired by Beis brunch to enhance and revise the company's safety policies amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Her day-to-day activities involve going to each location to ensure employees are dressed according to the company's policy,

inspecting to ensure stations are cleaned and foods are placed in the correct temperature and checking up on the warehouse employees to ensure tasks are done safely while asking employees for questions and concerns.

During Melanie's shift, she was assigned to check up on the warehouse employees to speak to them regarding any safety concerns they may have. While Melanie was doing her check-up at the spice and marination department, an employee was cleaning and mopping his section. When Melanie entered the station, she slipped and fell directly on her back. Melanie had trouble getting up however, she insisted that she was fine and did not require any medical aid.

Managers, HR, Accountants, Inspectors at Beis do not have a dress code which allows them to dress however they'd like. Therefore, Melanie was not wearing non-slip shoes causing her to slip and fall after the employee mopped the floor. Melanie began to feel persistent pain in her lower back, this caused her to have trouble standing for long periods of time. She decided to go to the clinic to make sure everything was okay. The doctor did an x-ray on Melanie's back and informed her that she has a tear in her ligaments causing inflammation in her muscles. She was prescribed to take anti-inflammatory medication and to seek physical therapy to help heal her back. Melanie informed the manager at Beis and he was understanding and accommodating to her needs. He ensured her that she can take time off from work as long as she needs to get better.

The manager recognizes that Melanie's position requires her to be active and ensured her she can take time off and offered her light-duty work when she returns. However, Beis only offers three days of paid sick leave and Melanie feels overwhelmed and anxious as she cannot afford to take more time off. Her feeling of being overwhelmed and anxious are a symptom of psychological strain. Melanie decides to go back to work after taking a week off, she is now working in the office and is only required to visit Beis locations twice a week. However, Melanie remains to have chronic pain in her lower back and is unable to be as active as she used to be without feeling discomfort and pain.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Should Beis brunch revise their company policy requiring all employees to wear non-slip shoes, even if they do not visit the warehouse often?
2. Beis only offers three days of paid sick leave for their employees; do you think this is enough for those who are severely injured and need more time off work?
3. Is the workplace accommodation of light-duty work enough for Melanie's condition?
4. What are some training initiatives that Beis brunch can implement to promote a safer workplace?

## Reference

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