

# Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards 2020-2022

## CASE STUDY



### Integrating ergonomics into corporate culture in a hospital group



#### ORGANISATION/COMPANY

GZA Ziekenhuizen/  
IDEWE

#### COUNTRY

Belgium

#### SECTOR

Hospital activities

#### TASKS

Patient care, administrative work, cleaning



Source: © GZA Ziekenhuizen

### Background

The GZA Ziekenhuizen group of hospitals with 3200 employees and 465 doctors has been using the services of IDEWE ergonomics prevention advisers for around 15 years. In 2013, an ergonomics policy was produced, setting out objectives and strategies. GZA Ziekenhuizen

aims to ensure that ergonomics is part of the hospitals' organisational culture.

The DuPont Bradley Curve (a tool to analyse the progressive maturity of a safety culture by looking at a spectrum of behaviours and attitudes) is used to evaluate the group's ergonomics policy, illustrating the stages in its progress towards excellence. According to

the curve, most departments were at the dependent stage (following rules), while some were already at the independent stage (individual responsibility). None of the departments were at the interdependent stage (responsible for yourself and others).

## Aims

The aim is for GZA Ziekenhuizen to develop a sustainable ergonomics culture across the entire organisation through consultation with experts and the active participation of employees at all levels.

## What was done and how?

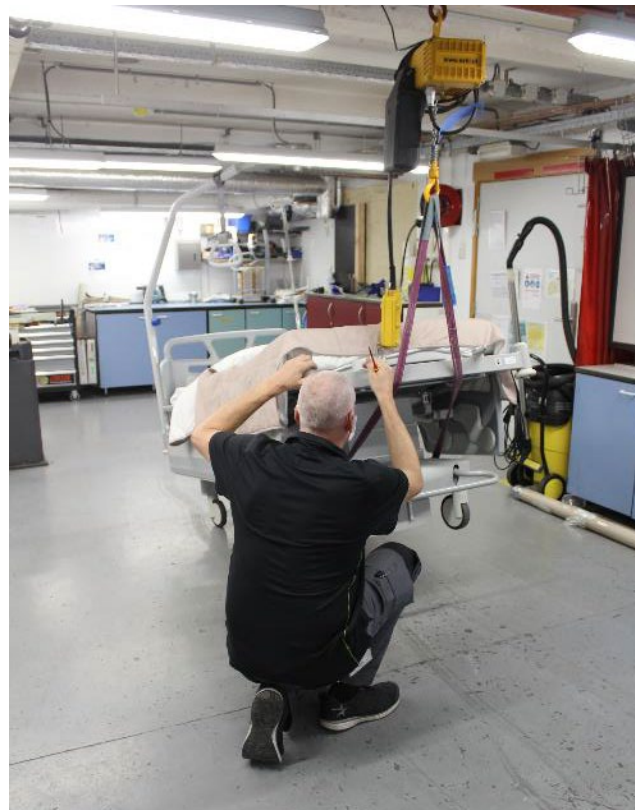
A central ergonomics steering committee composed of policy-makers from different departments was established to increase support among staff. Integrating ergonomics into the strategies of other policy areas ensured it becomes embedded throughout the organisation. A dedicated ergonomics officer played a key role by providing advice within the workplace and at workplace meetings. If they are unavailable, the ergonomists can be contacted by email and will respond within a week.

- As part of the preventive ergonomics drive to create an adapted workplace and provide suitable equipment, reception desk design guidelines were developed, advice on ergonomics given when buying equipment, and the GZA Ziekenhuizen intranet used to raise awareness of the ergonomic equipment required.
- The internal prevention service carries out a risk analysis of each service every three years. The ergonomist contacts the manager to ensure that any identified problems are tackled within six months and the necessary training provided, if required.
- Staff can submit an electronic form to request advice. Standard advice will be available on the intranet in the future.
- All new staff members receive ergonomics training when hired.
- Regular risk analyses ensure effective compliance with the ergonomics policy.
- The online self-assessment 'Optidesk' tool was used to map health risks to staff working with display screen equipment both in the workplace and in remote working, and to produce an action plan.
- Staff are closely monitored during return to work. Work accidents leading to musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are investigated and measures for improvement proposed.

## What was achieved?

The written ergonomics policy is evolving into a practical ergonomics culture, which is demonstrated by a drop in absence due to MSDs. Statistics based on questions asked during medical examinations indicate that GZA Ziekenhuizen scores above the benchmark on the following parameters over the past five years:

- MSDs account for an average of 14% of sick leave (benchmark average: 17.5%);
- the average percentage of sick leave days due to MSDs is 11.8% (benchmark average: 17.23%); and
- the average number of sick leave days due to MSDs is 15.75 (benchmark average: 24.75 days).



Source: © GZA Ziekenhuizen

## Success factors

The success of the ergonomics policy can be attributed to many complementary factors that reinforce each other:

- ergonomics is integrated into the strategies of other policy areas;
- senior management is committed to and involved in ergonomics;
- an ergonomics expert must work with other internal experts;
- ergonomics is presented in a positive light;
- ergonomics solutions address the source of the problem;
- a systematic approach is taken to the ergonomics policy;

- priority is given to quick wins;
- GZA Ziekenhuizen opts for a participative approach to ergonomics that involves everyone;
- both a bottom-up and a top-down approach are taken, which gets the message across to everyone.



Source: © GZA Ziekenhuizen

## Transferability

This holistic approach is transferable to other organisations like hospitals, but also to organisations in other sectors. Due to the relatively high costs involved in developing an ergonomics policy, hiring professional ergonomics services, providing training and purchasing equipment, this approach is better suited to large organisations. However, many aspects and measures could easily be adopted by medium and small enterprises on a smaller scale.

## Costs and benefits

Developing an ergonomics policy is expensive (training, appointing ergonomists, acquiring equipment), but it avoids long-term incapacity and early departure from

the workplace. Healthier staff are more productive and happier, which means that patients are also happier. In this sense, it can be argued that ergonomics boosts profits.

## Key features of good practice example

- This initiative demonstrates a holistic approach with attention to the design and risk analysis of the workstation, training and reintegration.
- It is a participative, multidisciplinary approach with concrete practical solutions or adjustments.
- The organisation sets specific goals, such as reaching the interdependence stage of the DuPont Bradley Curve and reducing long-term sick leave to below 6% by 2025.
- It advocates occupational safety and health and ergonomic ownership for all.

## Further information

Further information can be found at <https://www.gzaziekenhuizen.be>

## References and resources

<https://www.idewe.be>

*As part of a holistic approach, staff are closely monitored during return to work and incidents of MSDs are investigated and measures for improvement proposed.*