Healthcare: Safe Moving and Handling of Patients



Safety Talk

What's at Stake?

Overexertion injuries among healthcare workers is consistently two to five times greater than the rate of the general workforce. The single greatest cause for these injuries is manual patient handling such as manual lifting, moving and repositioning of hospitalized patients, home-health care patients, and nursing home residents.

These overexertion injuries can cause musculoskeletal injuries such as herniated discs, joint and tendon inflammation and ligament or muscle strains. Many healthcare workers sustain reoccurring, short-term and long-term issues including arthritis and chronic back pain.

What's the Danger?

Manually handling any heavy item is risky, but humans are often an awkward shape, move independently and can be unpredictable. And a patient's sudden movements can cause even the best planned maneuver to go wrong, resulting in staff and patient injury.

How to Protect Yourself

6 easy ways to keep you and the patient safe while moving them.

1. Avoid manual patient handling whenever possible.

2. Plan patient maneuvers.

- Have a clear handling plan for every patient, even the mobile ones.
- You and your colleagues must read and follow the plan.
- Include details of the type of assistance the patient needs for different maneuvers including:
    - prompting for correct stand to sit technique;
    - assistance rolling over in bed;
    - the use of any aids or equipment;
    - how many staff are needed to perform the list;
    - any special instructions or guidance; and a
    - date when the plan is to be reviewed.

3. Train and update

Your employer must provide safe patient handling training sessions covering the mechanics and risks of lifting and moving patients; and

- How to use any equipment or aids; and
- How to help the patient to do as much as possible for themselves. For example,
    - Explain the procedure;
    - Don’t rush them;
    - Assist them into position (without lifting); and
    - Provide aids or equipment for them to use.
- Safe manual handling techniques such as:
    - Stand close to the patient to reduce the risk of overreaching and the patient falling; and
    - Check the patient is well positioned to be moved with minimal effort.

You should also be given time to practice and receive regular training updates.

4. Use lifting aids

- Lifting aids help the patient move themselves more easily and include:
    - A raised toilet seat;
    - Shower chairs; and the use of a
- Make sure the patient knows how to use them; and
- Prompt, guide and reassure them as needed.

5. Use lifting equipment

- Equipment can be by healthcare workers to help move patients; and
- Patients are often taught to use the equipment, so they can be independent.
- Equipment includes:
    - Mechanical lifting equipment.
    - Height adjustable beds.
    - Wheelchairs; and
    - Pivot, sliding, or lateral slide boards.
- Each piece of equipment or moving aid should only be used by trained people.

6. Report it

- Fill out an accident report if you suffer pain or injury while carrying out care for a patient.
- Report any defective equipment, especially mechanical hoist slings and sliding sheets; and
- Discuss with your supervisor if you feel a patient’s handling plan is no longer safe.

Final Word

Manual patient handling causes significant issues for healthcare workers, with many staff taking time off for illness, and leaving the sector early due to wear and tear on their bodies. A whole organization approach to minimizing or reducing manual patient handling is required to reduce injury to healthcare workers.