

# **SAFE PATIENT HANDLING AND MOBILITY**

## **ANA POSITION**

ANA supports actions and policies that result in the elimination of manual patient handling. Patient handling, such as lifting, repositioning and transferring has conventionally been performed by nurses. The performance of these tasks exposes nurses to increased risk for work-related musculoskeletal disorders. With the development of assistive equipment and devices, such as lifting equipment and lateral transfer and friction reducing devices, the risk of musculoskeletal injury can be eliminated or significantly reduced. A Safe Patient Handling (SPH) program decreases injury to nurses, other health care workers and patients, while reducing work-related health care costs and improving the safety of patient care delivery

## **BACKGROUND**

Over the past decade, much attention has been given to the health and safety concern among health care workers. The extent of musculoskeletal disorders among the U.S. nursing workforce is particularly distressing when considered in the context of the current nursing shortage. In 2009, nurses ranked fifth on the list of occupations reporting on the job musculoskeletal injuries and had ranked ninth in 2003. Nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants also have staggering numbers of work-related musculoskeletal injuries and have been ranked consistently by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, between 1999 and 2009, as the first or second most dangerous occupation in the United States with incidence of musculoskeletal injuries ranging from 21,460 to 44,400 per year. Specifically, injuries secondary to patient handling tasks compound factors driving the shortage such as aging of the nursing workforce, declining retention and recruitment rates, and lowering social value of nursing.

Despite the recognition that manual patient handling is a high-hazard task, the incidence of musculoskeletal disorders persists at high rates for nurses and other nursing personnel – signaling the need for continued action. Emerging efforts to prevent musculoskeletal injuries have concentrated on reducing exposures through the use of assistive equipment and devices for patient handling. Since ANA’s Handle with Care campaign started in 2003, ten states have enacted “safe patient handling” legislation: California, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington, with a resolution in Hawaii. ANA supported these legislative initiatives, and will continue to seek new ways to advance this issue on both the state and federal level.

## **RATIONALE**

Over the last two decades, health care has rapidly become one of the most dangerous industries in the United States. Unfortunately, health care workers, particularly nursing personnel, experience a disproportionate rate of occupational illness and injuries compared to the private sector in general. More than any other work-related injury or illness, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are responsible for lost work time, the need for protracted medical care, and permanent disability among health care workers. Every day the average nurse lifts 1.8 tons per shift; as a result, nurses suffer debilitating and often career-ending and life-altering injuries from repeatedly lifting, moving, transferring, and repositioning patients.

Patient handling, transfers and manual lifting remain significant risks factors for back injuries. Recent changes in the health care environment have lowered staffing levels. Such downsizing efforts

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require individual nurses to care for more patients even as fewer staff are available to assist. ANA has strong evidence that current working conditions in health care are contributing to increased injury and disease among nurses as well as driving the staff nurse exodus from bedside nursing care. Additionally, technologically feasible and cost-effective solutions to controlling ergonomic hazards (such as mechanical patient lifting equipment and patient lateral transfer devices) now exist and have been successfully implemented in hospitals and nursing homes across the country.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health funded a longitudinal intervention study analyzing the impact of safe patient handling equipment on reducing back injuries for healthcare workers which demonstrated reductions in healthcare worker patient handling compensation costs by 84 percent, in injuries from patient transfers by 62 percent, in lost work days by 86 percent, in restricted workdays by 64 percent, and in recordable injury rates by 46 percent. Implementing Safe Patient Handling (SPH) programs in health care settings is a good business decision as well as a smart quality patient care investment.

Visit ANA's website dedicated to Safe Patient Handling for the latest information:

<http://www.anasafepatienthandling.org/>