

Physical hazards to workers include a wide range of conditions and situations that can lead to overexertion or injury. Lifting and transferring not based on proper ergonomics, assaults, falls and animal bites are all considered in the industrial hygiene framework of physical hazards.

Being an essential element of patient care, patient transfers should have the same consideration that other elements of patient care require: changing of dressings, bathing, giving medications, drawing blood, etc. Transferring the patient to and from the bed, the chair, or the bathroom may often lead to strain or sprain injuries of the back and /or even dropping and injuring the patient.

In addition, lifting is not the only activity involved in transferring a patient. But carrying, bending, twisting, pushing, pulling, and repetitive movements can also lead to strain and sprain injuries.⁽¹⁾ Therefore, in order to prevent such injuries, both management and employee must play an active role in implementing an ergonomic program.

To have an effective patient/transfer program, which will reduce the risk of sprain or strain injuries, the employee and the employer should take the following steps ⁽¹⁾:

1. Learn about the risk factors and conditions that can cause back injury. Inspect the workplace for hazards. Knowing the conditions, job tasks, and hazards is a key part of a prevention plan.⁽¹⁾

2. Use equipment and assistive devices. Get training on how to use these devices.⁽¹⁾

3. Organize job tasks and work practices in ways that reduce injury. Do a resident assessment.⁽¹⁾ A workable communication system is established so that the nursing/ health care personnel know how each resident is to be transferred. Employees should never have to decide for themselves how the transfer should be achieved.

4. Have a plan to provide care and support for any worker who is hurt.⁽¹⁾

5. Conduct ongoing training and education of workers, supervisors, and managers. Training and education help us to understand how we get hurt on the job and how to improve such stressful jobs.⁽¹⁾

Domestic violence and drug activity were two areas of particular concern to conference participants. Recommendations for addressing these issues includes:

Domestic Violence: The employer needs to define the steps to take if a worker observes or suspects partner or child abuse and how to report the situation. The safety of workers should be ensured through policy development, training and support. Workers should be aware of signs of abuse, how to assist the client if identified, and know the limits of their assistance. Workers can be trained about referrals and resources.

Drug Activity: If drug activity is noted in a specific location a team should provide care or assistance should be readily available. Ensure the safety of the worker allowing for their choices and judgements. Workers should be aware of CAPS resources in the community they serve and communicate with supervisors and the employer when drug activity is suspected.

In terms of controls suggestions include: Engineering--Fix buildings, provide lifting devices, involve police to remove a hazard. Administration--Contact landlords regarding building safety, work in a team for security, establish a written comprehensive safety program including reporting hazards. Personal Protective Equipment--flashlights, cell phones/pages, proper clothing.