

Safe Patient Handling Programs



Learn from the Leaders

Safe patient handling programs are being implemented across the country to help reduce musculoskeletal disorders among hospital workers. Following are just a few examples of the various types of safe patient handling programs that have seen results.

St. Vincent's Medical Center Shifts to a Culture of Safety Bridgeport, Connecticut

When it comes to financing projects or equipment related to safe patient handling, St. Vincent's Medical Center has a "safety trumps all" attitude. The hospital fosters a "high reliability" culture, and

two of its five high-level corporate goals relate to safety.

All associates share St. Vincent's culture of safety. High reliability opened channels of communication and encouraged caregivers to speak up about proper lifting. Associates are taught that it is "not part of the job" to get hurt handling patients. Individual departments are proud of the changes they made to improve safety.

St. Vincent's has not always taken this approach to patient handling. Although the hospital launched a safe patient handling program in 2005, lifts were not being used because the program lacked local "super users" and accountability from management to follow the policy. When the SmartMOVES program was reinvigorated in 2008, the hospital asked associates for their input on equipment and provided extensive hands-on training on its uses and benefits.

During the first year, patient handling injuries decreased 56 percent, and they continue to decrease: from 2012 to 2013, the hospital saw a 27 percent reduction. The success of the current program is also due to management commitment and transparency. Senior executives lead daily safety huddles, and "good catches" (i.e., reported near misses) are treated as opportunities to learn additional ways to improve safety.



St. Vincent's encourages caregivers to speak up about safety.

What is high reliability?

Organizations that foster a "high reliability" culture have systems in place that are exceptionally consistent in accomplishing their goals and avoiding incidents that lead to patient or worker injuries. These organizations have a commitment to safety at all times, are preoccupied with avoiding errors, and foster a blame-free environment where workers can report incidents without fear.



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What is a minimal lift policy?

Minimal lifting replaces manual lifting, transferring, and repositioning of patients with mechanical lifting or other patient assist devices, but acknowledges there may be circumstances in which mechanical devices cannot be used.

Southern Ohio Medical Center Champions Ergonomics

Portsmouth, Ohio

Southern Ohio Medical Center has made safety one of its five values, along with quality, service, relationships, and performance. To reduce musculoskeletal injuries among workers, the hospital employs two full-time ergonomists and has an Ergonomic Leadership Team dedicated to ergonomic issues. "Safety Champions" make sure that safe patient handling is practiced on all units.

The hospital has a "minimal lift" policy and lifting equipment available in every unit. To determine the right equipment for each unit, Southern Ohio Medical Center hosted a vendor fair and had employees try the different equipment options before purchasing. To encourage lift use, the Ergonomic Leadership Team demonstrates lift operation, nurses are tested during annual competencies, and Safety Champions make rounds, reminding staff that pulling "an extra pair of hands" for a manual lift means one less employee helping patients.

When the Ergonomic Leadership Team was temporarily disbanded in 2012, Southern Ohio Medical Center immediately saw nurses' musculoskeletal injuries increase. Once the Leadership Team was back in place and focused on re-education, these injuries returned to their previous low rates.



An employee demonstrates one of the hospital's patient lifts.

AnMed Health Puts Patients First and Sees Results for Workers

Anderson, South Carolina

When AnMed Health launched a new safe patient handling program in 2011, the hospital decided to hire a consultant to work directly with floor staff to determine and test the right equipment to meet its units' specific needs. The consultant trains staff on equipment use and regularly visits the hospital to troubleshoot and promote compliance. AnMed Health realized a 65 percent reduction in worker injuries related to patient handling after one year of the program, and the hospital's back injury claim rate fell 52 percent in the first 18 months. These improvements also contributed to a reduction in workers' compensation costs.

When it comes to promoting use of the equipment by its clinicians, AnMed Health found that patient safety was as attractive a benefit as worker safety. Consequently, when staff saw how using the equipment helped both patients and workers, they were more likely to use it. The safe patient handling program contributed to a 46 percent reduction in the number of patient falls in 2011 and 2012. Additional patient benefits include reduced length of stay, fewer skin ulcers, pneumonia reduction, increased mobility, and an increased sense of dignity. Focus groups have indicated staff satisfaction with the equipment and techniques. Nurses, particularly long-tenured nurses, said the safe patient handling program influenced them to stay on the job longer because of the safer work environment. Nurses and nursing aides also realized that using the equipment helped them maintain their strength and endurance over the course of a shift.

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AnMed Health's consultant demonstrates repositioning using a ceiling lift.

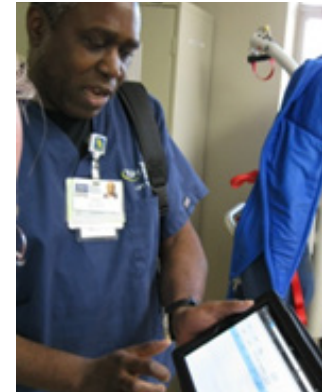
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Tampa General Lift Teams Help Take a Load Off Nurses

Tampa, Florida

The most innovative component of Tampa General Hospital's workplace safety program is its use of "lift teams"—two-person teams that specialize in using equipment to lift and transfer patients throughout this 1,000+ bed hospital. The lift teams have been in place for more than 10 years and have grown from six to 22 full-time equivalent employees.

Some two-person teams are scheduled for specific units, working their way through the unit repositioning patients according to each one's needs. Other teams are available on demand; they carry wireless tablet computers to receive and prioritize lift requests throughout the hospital. Response times are as short as five minutes, with most calls being answered in 15 to 20 minutes, which means nurses and assistants can feel confident paging a lift team instead of taking matters into their own hands. Caregivers have enough patient responsibilities to worry about, so a dedicated lift team literally and figuratively takes a load off their backs. The lift teams also take responsibility for equipment maintenance and inventory, which ensures that the equipment is accessible and ready for use.



Lift teams carry tablets so they can be easily reached.

Having dedicated lift teams has not only helped Tampa General to overcome barriers related to lift use and accessibility, but the teams have also contributed to a 65 percent decrease in patient handling injuries, a 90 percent reduction in lost workdays, and a 92 percent reduction in workers' compensation costs per dollar of payroll. These benefits far outweigh the costs of equipment, team member salaries, and training. Patients and their families appreciate the lift teams too. Lift team members are friendly faces who get to know each patient during his or her stay, carefully explaining exactly what they are going to do, and they use the equipment efficiently and with confidence. Patients of all sizes say this approach makes them feel they are treated with dignity.

Cincinnati Children's has seen an 83 percent reduction in lost time days in just three years.

Cincinnati Children's Lifts Even Little Ones with Care

Cincinnati, Ohio

Even though most of its work is in pediatrics, Cincinnati Children's Hospital realized the need for lift equipment as part of its safe patient handling program. Many young patients exceed the recommended 35-pound weight limit for manual lifting. In addition, Cincinnati Children's sees adult patients who are receiving continuing care for pediatric conditions.

Cincinnati Children's policy states that employees may not lift patients without mechanical assistance. Algorithms help determine which equipment and tools to use and when to use them. Ceiling lifts are installed in nearly every patient room; additionally a two-person lift team is available with portable equipment and a variety of slings. Nearly all floor staff are trained on how to use the lifts in their units. The hospital expects to see a nearly five-fold return on its investment in lifting equipment within five years.

For more information on safe patient handling, visit www.osha.gov/dsg/hospitals.

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