

POSITION STATEMENT

Safe Patient Handling

AOHP's position is to provide a safe and healthy environment for the nurse/caregiver and patient. Back injuries and other musculoskeletal disorders related to patient handling are the leading cause of workplace disability for nurses and other direct patient care providers. The importance of developing reliable approaches for prevention of back injuries and other musculoskeletal disorders related to patient handling is critical. The Association of Occupational Health Professionals in Healthcare (AOHP) supports actions, policies and laws that will help to establish a safer environment of care for nurses, other direct patient care providers and patients as it relates to safer patient handling and prevention of injuries.

- Employer and Management commitment to adopting an institutional policy that encompasses the safest approach for the care giver as well as to the patient when handling, moving and transporting patients. The safest approach is the use of assistive equipment and discourages the use of manual handling. There needs to be initial and ongoing investment in adequate supply of appropriate devices, ensuring availability of equipment and adequate storage space for equipment, proper disinfection based on infection control principles, educating staff on usage, and designating resource personnel for ongoing assessment and evaluation.
- Employee participation is vital in the assessment and implementation process to encourage acceptance and success of the program. Staff have a wealth of essential information about specific hazards in their work environment associated with patient handling and can assist in guiding actions that will ensure program effectiveness and positive outcomes.

Staff must also be involved and given authority in the evaluation and selection of patient handling devices and equipment. They also need to be involved with initial and ongoing education/training activities related to patient handling and the use of assistive devices and equipment.

- Regulation and enforcement of a standard to control ergonomic hazards in the healthcare industry to prevent back injuries and musculoskeletal disorders. The regulation should include the use of engineering controls for patient handling activities. AOHP supports a continued call to OSHA and state legislation to develop such standards that are appropriate and reasonable to healthcare employers.
- Support of research and evidence based practice to continue the ongoing development of interventions to prevent back injuries and musculoskeletal disorders related to patient handling. Further study is also recommended to redesign other high-risk tasks to promote safer work environments for nursing staff. Prompt communication of current study findings to the association and partnering organizations is critical in reducing these injuries and disorders.

In summary, AOHP believes that manual patient handling is unsafe for the caregiver and patient. Such handling is also directly responsible for disabling back injuries and musculoskeletal disorders in nurses and other direct patient care providers. Utilizing safe patient handling will be a way to reduce stress for nurses to help them stay in the profession. Safe patient handling can occur with assistive devices ensuring improved quality patient care, and outcomes. The ultimate benefits are afforded to the nurse/caregiver, patient and employer. AOHP welcomes the opportunity to work collaboratively with regulatory agencies and professional associations to promote safe patient handling and reduced healthcare worker injuries.

References:

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