Training Lift Teams to Avoid MSIs



Train the Trainer – Ergonomics

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A good way to prevent musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs) is to follow the lead of the healthcare industry. After all, healthcare workers suffer MSIs more frequently than any other professional group—with backaches, neck pain and shoulder injuries leading the way. Of course, whether you're lifting patients or pallets, the same technique can help you protect your workers from MSIs. So, let's take a look at how they do it.

The Lift Team's Purpose

A lift team is a group of workers who are specially trained and dedicated to the task of lifting, moving and repositioning patients, including patients who are obese, immobile, or otherwise hard to move.

Lift teams keep healthcare workers from having to perform these tasks and thus have less exposure to ergonomic injuries.

Organizing the Lift Team

Lift teams can be organized in a variety of ways, depending on the size of the facility:

- Larger facilities often organize lift teams by floor or unit. Thus, personnel on the floor are called upon by their colleagues whenever they need help moving or repositioning a patient. The message for assistance is transmitted from the nursing desk.
- Smaller facilities generally organize two or three groups of lift teams that service either the entire facility or specific sections of the facility. In this case, members of the lift team are summoned by an overhead page or by a beeper message.

The key is to have staff trained and ready to assist others in moving patients, and a system in place to summon the team. Because patient lifting and moving may be needed at any time of the day, many facilities have lift teams available around-the-clock.

Training Lift Team Members: Lifting Techniques

Once teams are organized, you must provide team members in proper lifting techniques, including the use of equipment specifically designed to help them do their jobs. It's also wise to provide team members additional training to enhance their ability to help patients and their value to your company. That may include training in:

- CPR;
- Preventing the spread of infectious diseases, including through exposure to blood borne pathogens; and
- Handling the problems that can arise when individuals are unable or unwilling to move on their own.

Training: The Team Concept

You must also educate team members and other members of your staff about the team's responsibilities. This way you'll get better results from your lift team. Here are some pointers:

1. **Identify Potential Users**

The first step is to identify who in your facility would use the team. Do some research and compile a list of those in your facility who occasionally need to move or lift patients or other heavy non-human items. In most healthcare facilities, lift teams benefit:

- Nurses
- Transporters
- Radiology technicians
- Physical therapists

2. **Conduct a Survey**

Once you've completed your list, invite those groups to participate in a survey. The objective is to get employees in your facility thinking about how they would use lift teams and what effect such use might have on their daily work routine. Some questions to healthcare facilities include in their survey, which you can adapt for your own facility:

- How often are patient lifts required on your unit?
- What types of patients are housed in your unit: surgical, elderly, obese, etc.?
- Are you willing/able to participate in a lift team?

3. **Promote the Lift Team**

Once you collect and analyze the survey information, let everyone in your facility know about this new resource. You can do this by:

- Implementing a public relations campaign to advertise the formation of these teams and the benefits they will bring to your organization;
- Offering education programs to teach employees about the specific duties of the lift teams, the training that team members have received, and what to expect from them.

Conclusion

Hiring employees to work on lift teams costs money. However, the money saved by not paying workers’ compensation and sick leave claims will more than balance the cost of new staff. More importantly, there’s no price that can be placed on maintaining the health and safety of employees by eliminating ergonomics injuries.