

Lift Off! Launching a “No Lift” Environment on an Acute Care Unit: Implementation of a Safe Patient Handling Program
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Problem: Job satisfaction is of primary concern of employers today especially in the face of a nursing shortage and aging workforce. Job satisfaction is negatively related to physically demanding work practices.

Evidence: As cited by Nelson and Baptiste (2006), an estimated 12% of nursing personnel will transfer to a less demanding work environment and another 12-18% will leave the profession due to back pain. A biomedical study performed by Marras indicates that most manual patient handling tasks place health care workers at a 76% risk of injury (Charney, Simmons, Lary, Metz, 2006). Nurses consistently identify that improving the work environment improves satisfaction and is one method to address the nursing shortage (Albaugh, 2005).

Strategy: Safe patient handling strategies outlined by Nelson et al. (2006) after a review of the evidence was implemented on a 36 bed Medical/Surgical unit in a 600 bed acute care hospital. The safe patient handling program was continually re-enforced with staff, evaluated, and re-adjusted based on those evaluations.

Practice Change: No patient tasks are performed in which the forces on the spine are excessive. Mechanical devices were fully implemented for patient handling tasks.

Evaluation: Implementation of this program was difficult. Nurses believed that using mechanical devices was inconvenient and time-consuming. Once fully enmeshed in the program, few nurses on this unit today would manually lift patients as they had done in the past.

Results: Employee injury costs, lost/restricted workdays related to patient handling went to zero. Employee turnover decreased and anecdotal stories of increased staff satisfaction were noted. A secondary benefit to patients was noted in the decrease in the occurrence of pressure ulcers on that nursing unit (from 5.4% - 0%).

Recommendations: A decline in occupational stress by reducing physical demands will increase nursing satisfaction leading to an increase in the recruitment/retention of nursing personnel.

Bibliography:

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