

Building a Successful Transfers and Lifts Program for Caregivers

This OSACH Fast Fact is intended to help workers, JHSC members, supervisors and managers understand the importance of building a successful transfers and lifts program for caregivers.

Back Injuries and related muscle strains are the most common injuries among caregivers. Most of these injuries are related to patient, resident or client handling tasks.

The Key Steps

Here are some of the key steps that many organizations have taken to help protect their workers from these injuries when transferring and lifting their patients.

1. Obtain start-up commitment from management to initiate work on this issue

Before the organization commits resources to developing and implementing a transfers and lifts program, data needs to be gathered on the extent of the client handling issue at your facility. This initial step needs commitment from management, as it will entail time on the part of the employees involved.

2. Form a multidisciplinary committee or assign a project coordinator if you are a small organization

This committee should represent front line workers, supervisors and any resource personnel that could contribute to this project. In a larger facility, this may include a staff educator, physiotherapist or occupational therapist and a health and safety specialist.

3. Assess the current situation

To ensure a comprehensive program is developed and the implementation is successful, the current status of client handling needs to be explored and the potential barriers need to be identified before they become obstacles. Information should be gathered on issues such as injury rates, equipment availability and usage, client resistance, staff resistance, environmental challenges, and so on. The information may be gathered through data, focus groups, policies and procedures, and observation.

4. Build a business case for senior management

In order for the organization to devote resources to this program, the senior management needs to be convinced that it is a significant issue and one worth committing dollars to. This can be done by calculating direct and indirect costs associated with past client handling incidents. Remember that indirect costs may range from 3-10 times the direct costs. (The WSIB uses a conservative value of 4 times.)

5. Program Development

Developing a transfers and lifts program will include writing policies and procedures, formulating training plans, determining communication strategies, overcoming potential barriers and establishing evaluation indicators.

6. Implementation

A successful implementation plan will address how this program will be introduced to managers, staff, clients and their families. The implementation strategy may decide to pilot testing the program elements in high injury rate areas.

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7. Evaluation

The evaluation of the program should consider quantitative and qualitative indices. The quantitative indicators may be variables such as number of incidents, severity of the incidents, staff use of mechanical lifts and so on. The qualitative indicators may consider issues such as numbers of complaints, compliance with policies and procedures, completion of client handling assessments, and so on.

Remember — the care-giving business depends on its service providers. Without them, there would be no delivery of service. The time and effort spent in building a successful transfers and lifts program for caregivers will be a win-win situation for an organization, its staff and clients.

The benefits of having healthy caregivers who are able to come to work day after day and carry out their job demands without placing themselves at risk is well worth the investment.