

## Patient Handling Injury Prevention Program

Caregivers can experience musculoskeletal injuries (MSI) when the physical demands of the job task exceed the physical capabilities of the worker, resulting in strain or sprain type injuries. Many caregivers have been injured during work tasks, some never returning to the job they love and are highly trained to perform. Understanding the ergonomic risk factors, the early signs and symptoms of injury and work procedures that control or minimize the risks will help to keep workers healthy and safer at work which is important for everyone, including caregivers and their families, patients and Interior Health.

Moving and assisting patients can be challenging due to many factors including:

- Unpredictability of patient movements
- Difficulty of holding patients (no convenient handles)
- Patient and/or family preferences differing from care plans

Research findings are well documented regarding the cumulative risk to caregivers from lifting and transferring patients. The research also shows that interventions based solely on lifting techniques or back-care education have no impact on work practices or injury rates. Being able to accurately assess the patient's ability to participate, being attentive to the risk factors, following the care plan, using available equipment, and being aware of one's own abilities helps to reduce the likelihood and consequences of injury. The prevention of MSIs often requires changing work practice and re-designing job tasks.

Interior Health places a high priority on maintaining a safe work environment for employees while providing quality patient care. The [Safe Patient Handling Policy](#) demonstrates the organization's commitment to reducing injuries and unnecessary risk, and clearly directs care providers to use the safest work procedures while providing high quality care; the policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of all workers in working towards this end. The Patient Handling Injury Prevention Program includes:

- management commitment and support
- patient handling equipment - assistive equipment and transfer devices need to be available, used and promoted frequently as a way to improve safety and function in acute, long-term care and home settings
- equipment maintenance
- patient specific assessments re mobility, toileting, bathing, etc.
- point-of-care risk assessment – caregivers need to identify the patient's ability to participate in their care, identify what is required on the care plan, assess the environment and assess their own skill and readiness to provide care
- employee/supervisor education and training
- additional training for safe patient handling resource staff
- a shared ownership approach to safe patient handling
- annual evaluation of the Safe Patient Handling Program – needs to include a gap analysis and development of an action plan to identify/track corrective action items

Communicate to all care providers, including ancillary staff (e.g. imaging, lab) on the most appropriate ways of moving and assisting patients to ensure a consistent approach by all care providers. Swift and open communication of the plan, and any adjustments required because of changing patient ability, is essential. All staff interacting with a patient need to know how to assess the patient's ability to participate in their care and have the skills to make choices which protect the safety of the patient and themselves.