General Sling Guidelines

Sling Selection

Sling style selection is based on assessment of the patient’s body shape and functional abilities and not necessarily the care task to be performed.

Discuss any difficulties/issues when applying a sling (or transferring a patient) with a Peer Leader or a Rehab team member.

Generally, more dependent or unpredictable patients will require a universal sling for transfers and toileting.

Patients assessed as having adequate upper body control and the ability to follow direction may be suitable for a hygiene sling, for procedures taking a few minutes only.

A repositioning sling may be required for turning or positioning in bed.

If a patient falls to the floor, a universal or repositioning sling can be used with either a ceiling track lift or total floor lift to move the patient from the floor. Do NOT use a hygiene sling to lift patients off the floor.

Patients with total hip replacement or hip pinning, bilateral amputations or any other complications that require specialized transfer assessments or specialty slings must be referred to Rehab promptly.

Sling Inventory, Labeling and Storage

A serial number is on each sling for tracking purposes and as such should not be removed. All slings are warranted. Please consult the vendor’s sling information for details and contact information. All problems/concerns must be documented on the Sling Inventory and Annual Inspection Form and shared with the supervisor on shift.

All slings can be labeled in various ways. Slings can be labeled for each unit/facility using a laundry marker on the care label. Consider that slings may go off-site and therefore labeling should include facility name and unit (where applicable). Avoid the use of acronyms, if possible. Avoid permanently labeling slings for patients.

It is recommended that sling hooks be installed in patient rooms for individual sling storage. Additional hooks should also be installed in a common area for general sling storage (e.g. tub room, laundry drying room or storage room). This area should be used for storage of clean slings only.
Sling Safety and Inspection

Slings are to be used only by staff that have been trained in their safe use.

Inspect the sling before each use. This visual sling inspection must include the following:

- Check all loops at connection points for signs of fraying or loose stitching
- Check entire sling body for loose stitching, rips, holes or bleach staining
- Check for signs of weakening of fabrics (e.g. heat damage, brittle, stiff, puckered fabric) or significant staining
- Check all buckles and closures

If there are any signs of sling breakdown, the sling must be removed from service. Contact the supervisor and/or clinician responsible. The vendor and/or their representative must complete repairs to maintain warranty agreements to ensure sling integrity must be maintained. Use an alternate sling for the procedure. Always ensure that the sling material is not cutting into the patient's skin and causing discomfort. If the sling needs to be adjusted, lower the patient back down first. Avoid pulling on the sling material to adjust the sling placement while the patient is in the air.

Patients at risk of, or with, skin breakdown may require protective covering over the affected area before transferring. Additionally, a specialized assessment to be completed by Rehab or a wound care specialist may indicate that an alternative sling may be required (e.g. padded universal instead of quilted universal or hammock instead of universal).

A complete sling inventory and inspection should be conducted on a regular schedule (e.g. semi-annually or annually – as specified in vendor sling information). Refer to Sling Inventory and Annual Inspection Form.

Leaving Transfer Slings Behind Patients in a Chair

Universal slings may be left behind patients while in their chair. If leaving a sling behind a patient, care should be taken to neatly tuck all straps behind and beside the patient. Leg pieces can also be taken out from under the thigh and tucked neatly in the side of the chair.

The decision to leave a sling behind a patient in a chair or bed, should consider both the patient’s needs and staff safety. The decision to remove the sling should consider the patient’s ability to actively lean forward and (1) the patient has the ability to assist with removal and replacement of the sling and (2) that there is minimal risk of injury to staff during sling application in the chair.
Leaving Repositioning Slings Under Patients in Bed

Repositioning slings may be left under patients in their bed throughout the day/night. If leaving a sling under a patient, care should be taken to remove wrinkles from the material and to tuck straps under the mattress. It is recommended that two care staff remove wrinkles by pulling on opposite corners of the sling at the same time.

Flat bed sheets and/or soaker pads can be placed on top of the repositioning sling to absorb moisture. Other items may also be used in combination with the repositioning sling (e.g. sheepskins, slider sheets).

If the patient is on a low-pressure mattress, consult with community rehab therapists or the wound care specialist for appropriate bed make-up.

Initial indications support the use of a repositioning sling on top of a low-pressure mattress when left loose on top of the mattress.

Care and Laundering of Slings

All manufacturers’ laundering instructions are to be followed. Please consult the vendor sling guide or care label for appropriate laundry information.

Typical laundry instructions for slings:
- In agitator machines, slings are to be washed in a washing/laundry bag
- Wash in hot water (140°F or 60 - 80°C)
- Hang to dry or dry at low (cool) temperatures for 10 – 15 minutes.
- Do not use bleach
- Do not iron
- Do not dry clean

Sling safety and warranty coverage may be compromised if manufacturers’ laundry instructions are not followed.

Sling Ordering

Each facility is responsible for replacement and ordering of new slings.

E-Learning Opportunities:

- Patient Transfer Slings
- Repositioning Slings
- Specialty Slings