

LIFE BEYOND THE CHAIR: THE LIFT AND TRANSFER SOLUTION

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For healthcare professionals and those providing care in the home, the tasks of lifting, positioning and transferring clients or a disabled family member are stressful and cause injuries. Family caregivers are often well intentioned but untrained. Facility caregivers are often well intentioned, trained, yet working with time constraints. With injuries related to manual handling on the rise in healthcare, it is essential that the principles of safe handling are incorporated into daily transfer routines.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act is the fundamental legal authority in Ontario. This act is very specific with regards to the moving and handling of loads. In healthcare the load is our client. It can be summarized as having 3 main objectives.

Objectives of Occupational Health and Safety Act

1. To avoid manual handling operations as much as reasonably possible.
2. To assess any hazardous manual handling operations that cannot be avoided.
3. To remove or reduce the risk of injury as far as reasonably possible.

A manual handling operation can be defined as any task involving supporting or transporting of a load by human effort. Manual Handling accounts for 75% of health care injuries. In the year 2004 there were 2,500 injuries related to client handling in Ontario. (1)

By implementing a Minimal Lift Policy organizations remain in compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act. A minimal lift policy creates a standard on how to implement client handling, using mechanical aids provided to reduce the risk of injury associated with this task. Implementing a policy has clearly defined benefits for the clients, staff and the organization.

Benefits of a Minimal Lift Policy

Client Benefits

1. Creates a safe environment.
2. Increases quality of care
3. Encourages client to remain activated.

Caregiver Benefits

1. Reduces risk of injury.
2. Increases staff morale.
3. Improves quality of life outside of the workplace.

Organization Benefits

1. Injury rate decreases.
2. Reduction in WSIB claims.
3. Increases quality of care within the organization.
4. Staff retention.

A Minimal Lift Policy with clearly defined responsibilities of all members of the organization will ensure a successful Injury Prevention Program.

Risk Assessment

A Risk Assessment is a careful examination of what in your work can cause harm to you or others. A number of questions should be asked with regards to the load, the individual performing the task, the task itself and the environment. If any of the answers suggest there may be risk involved in carrying out the task, then suitable arrangements should be made to ensure that the risk is reduced or removed.

When manual handling cannot be avoided, caregivers must work safely to avoid the risk of injury. By implementing the principles of safe handling into our care routines we can reduce our risk of injury.

Principles of Safe Handling

1. Don't lift ~ use mechanical devices provided.
2. Risk assess it.
3. Assume the Power Position~ a wide offset base. You are much stronger and more stable in this position.
4. Bend your knees~ use your quadriceps. These are the muscles designed for lifting!
5. Keep your pelvis in a neutral position.
6. Face the direction of movement, by moving your feet. ~ do not twist! Our spines are not designed to twist in the lumbar region!
7. Keep the load close. ~ Every object has a centre of gravity; that point at which everything around it is balanced. If you try to line up the centre of gravity with your own, you will lessen your load.
8. Communication ~ not only with your partner but with the client. They cannot help if they do not know what is expected of them.
9. Follow natural patterns of body movement ~ when you against natural patterns you will exert more effort. I.e. assisting a client out of a chair. A natural pattern is to lean forward and push up to stand. If a caregiver does not lean the client forward first: having them mimic the natural patterns, they will be lifting that client out of the chair. Try to stand up from a chair without leaning forward!
10. Move in stages if necessary ~ there is nothing wrong with moving in stages. Caregivers tend to be very interventive, wanting to complete the task quickly.

It is also important to use equipment provided to reduce our risk of injury. There are many devices to choose from. Mechanical lifts take the complete weight of a client. A client suitable for a lift is non-weight bearing. A sit to stand is a mechanical device designed as an active client transfer system. A suitable candidate will have some weight bearing capabilities whether in one or both arms and one or both legs. They should also be able to follow simple instructions. There are also a variety of repositioning products on the market. Repositioning sheets allow a caregiver to reposition a client in bed, while reducing friction on their skin and reducing the risk of injury to the caregiver's upper extremities.

Becoming proactive within your organization with regards to the implementation of an Injury Prevention Program will dramatically reduce costs, increase quality of care and satisfaction within the workplace. Reminding ourselves and others to work safely will also increase morale and quality of life outside the workplace.

References

1. WSIB Firm Experience Snapshot Period. September 2005

Speaker Bio

With over 15 years experience as a long-term care nurse, Leanne provides a diverse range of experience, from front line caregiver, to Wound Care Coordinator to management and staff education positions. Leanne has served on the Education Committee for the Alzheimer's Society of Kitchener Waterloo and is a part time faculty member of Sheridan Institute for Applied Arts and Technology in the Personal Support Worker Program. For the past 6 years Leanne has worked with lift manufacturers and has extensive knowledge on various lifts, slings and minimal lift policies and programs. Leanne works as the Manager, Long Term Care Services for Motion Specialties. Leanne can be reached at lchambers@themotiongroup.com.