

Moving and handling of patients

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No one working in a hospital, nursing home, social care, community or emergency services should need to put their personal safety at risk when moving or handling patients. Hoists, sliding aids, electric profiling beds, other specialised equipment and correct safe handling techniques mean staff should no longer have to risk injury while doing their job. However, poor manual handling and poor ergonomic practices still continue to take their toll on the health of NHS staff. The HSE reports that in human health and social work activities, there were an estimated 68,000 work-related cases of musculoskeletal disorder (new or long-standing), which constitutes 22 per cent of all ill health in this sector.

Patients should be encouraged and allowed to move independently and contribute to the movement where assessed as able. The manual handling of patients should only commence once a suitable and sufficient risk assessment has been carried out, and any appropriate equipment is in place and used in line with the individual's care plan. It is important that staff are competent and confident in patient handling techniques and have been suitably and sufficiently trained to use the equipment provided.

The organisation's patient handling policy must include a commitment to use safer principles and to reduce manual handling and the associated risk of injury as far as possible. Risk assessments should be based on balanced decision-making to meet the needs of the patient and protect the patient and staff from risk. Blanket policies for manual handling do not address the complex issues involved in moving people.

The key message is that much of the time, manual handling of patients can be avoided through the provision and use of a variety of lifting equipment, handling aids and sound design of hospitals and care facilities. The same message applies to manual handling by other groups including kitchen staff, porters and administrative or clerical staff.

It is important to ensure that any equipment provided for manual handling activities are regularly checked, prior to use for example, maintained and where required, inspected/examined in line with regulatory requirements. For example, hoists used to move people must be examined a minimum of every six months in line with the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER) and the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999.

The Guide to the Handling of People contains further advice and guidance on people handling and assessment. National Back Exchange also offers professional publications and leaflets.