

Top 10 Secrets to success to start a safe lifting program in the health care or nursing home workplace

SafeLiftingPortal.com is pleased to share the following 10 insights with you – insights that have been distilled from successful safe lifting programs from around the country.

Information courtesy of Liko – The Safe Lifting People.
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More than one third of caregiver injuries resulting in lost work are due to lifting or repositioning patients.

Source: American Nurses Assoc.

1 Commission a team – Launch your safe lifting program by forming a committee and developing a simple statement of objectives. Encourage multidisciplinary representation on the team. Consider including representatives from PT/OT, Nursing, Safety, HR, Administration, Facilities, and Risk Management.

2 Conduct a facility-wide audit – Utilize commonly accepted assessment tools to audit your facility's musculo-skeletal injury rates, workers' compensation costs, indirect costs, and projected equipment usage rates on a unit-by-unit basis. Perform actual clinical patient handling assessments with various staff caregivers. Set up benchmarks.

3 Evaluate existing assistive devices – Inventory any existing equipment. Then, based on projected needs, compile a list of required new equipment by type and functional requirements. Include lateral transfer sheets, repositioning sheets, mobile floor lifts, ceiling lifts, and all other assistive devices that might contribute to your goal of reducing manual handling injuries.

4 Perform a comprehensive return-on-investment analysis – Obtain cost estimates for the required new equipment and calculate how much your program will save based on current industry averages. Then, present your evidence-based return-on-investment findings to your CFO for discussion and refinement.

5 Enlist administrative backing – Build a practical, clinical, and economic case to strengthen your position. Ask directly for management's support and participation. Determine whether funding is allocated. Don't run the risk of leaving out a key manager who could later derail your entire program.

6 Formulate an action plan – Solicit input from all team members to ensure a fair and unbiased approach. Major plan components should include budgetary summaries, roll-out tactics, and strategic issues such as whether to deploy Lift Specialists or assign "Super Users" on key units.



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7 Assign responsibilities – Safe lifting programs require a long-term commitment. For example, assign one individual the responsibility for periodic equipment inspections, including wear and tear, proper sanitation and infection control, sling inventories, condition of batteries, and preventative maintenance. Also, appoint a team to evaluate and recommend a vendor.

8 Communicate your plan – Launch your program in a professional manner. Assign responsibilities for internal and external communications, compliance issues, and periodic reevaluation of results versus benchmarks. And remember that frequent, open communication with employees is important to your program's success.

9 Develop a flexible training curriculum – Effective training of health care workers is a complex undertaking due to a variety of shifts, rotating and part-time staff, personnel turnover, and inability to attend in-service sessions. Avoid these issues by developing a flexible training program to accommodate the needs of every individual. Stress the need for staff competency, and build in a means of continuously enhancing practical clinical skills.

10 Manage change – Don't let change manage you. "Change Management" is an indispensable element of your program and is critical to your success. If you manage change successfully and overcome the manual lifting habits of caregivers, your program is much more likely to become permanently embedded in the culture of your organization. ■