

# ERGONOMICS

Ergonomics is the science of fitting the job to the worker. When there is a mismatch between the physical requirements of the job and the physical capacity of the worker, work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) can result. Ergonomics is the practice of designing equipment and work tasks to conform to the capability of the worker, it provides a means for adjusting the work environment and work practices to prevent injuries before they occur. Health care facilities especially nursing homes have been identified as an environment where ergonomic stressors exist.

## Potential Hazard

Employee exposure to work related MSDs from ergonomic stressors that have not been effectively identified and addressed in a facilities safety and health program.

Many patients/residents (especially nursing home residents) are totally dependent on staff members to provide activities of daily living, such as dressing, bathing, feeding, and toileting. Each of these activities involve multiple interactions with handling or transferring of patients/residents and could result in employee injuries. Employee injuries lead to increased injury costs, higher turnover rates, increased sick/injured days, and staffing shortages.

## Possible Solutions

OSHA's OSH Act of 1970 strives to "assure safe and healthful working conditions for working men and women..." and mandates that "each employer shall furnish to each of his/her employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his/her employees."

OSHA recommends minimizing manual lifting of patients/residents in all cases and eliminating lifting when possible.

OSHA recommends that employers identify and address ergonomic stressors in their facility's safety and health plan. General safety and health plan information can be found in the Administration - Safety and Health Program.

Areas that should be addressed a facility's safety and health program include:

- Management Leadership/Employee Participation

- Workplace Analysis

- Accident and Record Analysis

- Hazard Prevention and Control

- Medical Management

- Training

Management Leadership/Employee Participation:

Management Leadership should demonstrate a commitment to reduce or eliminate patient/residents handling hazards through establishing a written program that addresses issues, such as:

- Continued training of employees in injury prevention.

- Methods of transfer and lifting to be used by all staff.

§ Compliance with transfer and lift procedures.

Procedures for reporting early signs and symptoms of back pain and other musculoskeletal injuries.

Employee Participation should include:

- Complaint/suggestion program which includes employee reports of unsafe working conditions.

- Prompt reporting of signs and symptoms as well as injuries.

Workplace Analysis to identify existing and potential workplace hazards and find ways to correct these hazards. Assessment of work tasks involves an examination of duration, frequency, and magnitude of exposure to ergonomic stressors such as force, repetition, awkward postures, vibration and contact stress to determine if employees are at risk of pain or injury. Observation, workplace walkthroughs, talking with employees and periodic screening surveys are used to help identify hazards such as stressful tasks.

Accident and Record Analysis: Records of injuries and illnesses should be analyzed to identify patterns of injury that occur over time, enabling the hazards to be addressed and prevented. This includes reviewing OSHA 300 logs, OSHA 301 forms and Workers' Compensation reports.

Hazard Prevention and Control including implementing administrative and engineering controls.

Administrative controls: Provide for adequate staffing, assessment of patient/residents needs, and restricted admittance policies.

Engineering controls: Help to isolate or remove the hazards from the workplace, for example providing proper selection, training, and use of assist devices or equipment (see Patient Handling Controls Section).

Medical Management: A medical management program, supervised by a person trained in the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders, should be in place to manage the care of those injured. The program should:

Accurate injury and illness recording.

Early identification and treatment of injured employees.

“Light duty” or “no lifting” work restrictions during recovery periods.

Systematic monitoring of injured employees to identify when they are ready to return to regular duty.

Training: A training program, designed and implemented by qualified persons, should be in place to provide continual education and training about ergonomic hazards and controls to managers, supervisors and all healthcare providers, including “new employee” orientation. Training should be updated and presented to employees as changes occur at the workplace, and be at a level of understanding appropriate for those individuals being trained, and should also include:

The opportunity to ask questions of the trainer.

An overview of the potential risks, causes, and symptoms of back injury and other injuries. Be able to identify existing ergonomic stressors and methods of control, such as the use of engineering, administrative, and work practice controls particularly safe resident handling techniques.

Recognizing the signs and symptoms of MSDs and the procedures for reporting potential problems.

Encouragement of staff physical fitness.

Lifting guidelines for health care workers (nurse assistants, licensed practical nurses, registered nurses) which should include:

Never transfer patients/residents when off balance.

Lift loads close to the body.

Never lift alone, particularly fallen patients/residents, use team lifts or use mechanical assistance.

Limit the number of allowed lifts per worker per day.

Avoid heavy lifting especially with spine rotated.

Training in when and how to use mechanical assistance.

Additional Information:

Ergonomics. OSHA Safety and Health Topics Page.

Ergonomics - Additional Information

# Ergonomics

I understand and agree to comply with all safety standards set forth by my employer, HealthSource Global Staffing.

I certify by my signature below, that I have been provided with the HealthSource Global Staffing Ergonomics advisory.

---

---