

Reduce Injuries and Healthcare Costs

Healthcare worker injuries cost U.S. hospitals an estimated \$2 billion a year in worker's compensation.

As the nursing population continues to age and the obesity crisis generates even heavier patients, injuries and costs are likely to rise.

In 2011, U.S. hospitals recorded 58,860 work-related injuries and illnesses that caused employees to miss work. In terms of lost-time case rates, it is more hazardous to work in a hospital than in construction or manufacturing, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Caregivers and patients face many related hazards. For example, manual lifting can cause caregiver injury and also put patients at risk of falls, fractures, bruises, and skin tears. Caregiver fatigue, injury, and stress are tied to a higher risk of medication errors and patient infections.

Furthermore, injuries contribute to high turnover costs as hospitals are forced to recruit, hire, train and pay new staff. The Journal of Nursing Management in 2012 estimated the cost of replacing a nurse as up to \$103,000 depending on a variety of factors.

The cost of implementing a comprehensive safe lift policy, including the purchase of equipment, can be recouped in 12-24 months from the workmen's compensation and other related savings.

The 2014 Safe Patient Lifting Bill requires hospitals to develop and implement plans to achieve a safe environment to avoid injuries to employees or patients. The bill requires the plans to be evidence based and specifies the various factors, such as mechanical lifting devices, specialized training, etc. that must be considered.

Safe Patient Handling Works

Tampa General Hospital has implemented a lift team approach with mechanical lifting equipment that has reduced patient handling injuries by 65 percent and associated costs by 92 percent.

SEIU Local 1991's Operational Efficiency Task Force is working on initiatives to help **Jackson Health System** save money by improving operations and patient safety.

Our Safe Patient Handling Project brought in ARJO HUNTLEIGH, one of the world leaders in integrated solutions for the care of people with reduced mobility, to make a preliminary assessment at Jackson.

ARJO estimated that Jackson could save between \$9 million and \$14 million by implementing a variety of suggested safe handling procedures to improve patient care and eliminate manual handling and reduce preventable staff and patient injuries, falls, pressure ulcers, DVT and other immobility-related events.

Jackson has begun implementing the findings.

For more information, contact Ron Bilbao, Political Director, at ron@seiu1991.org.