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Working safely with manual handling

Work of any sort, especially if you have close contact with people and use some type of machinery, can present some risk to your health, safety and welfare.

Occupational Health and Safety is the responsibility of everyone. In Australia there is both federal and state legislation aimed at ensuring the health, safety and welfare of all members of the organisation. The goal of the legislation is to promote safe and healthy working environments through consultation between workers, worker representatives and management.

As with any legislation, it will only be successful if people want it to be. It is important to set a good example by being aware of the relevant legislation and policies and to uphold not only the law, but also the spirit of the law.

To ensure that employers and employees take their responsibilities and activities seriously, legislators have provided penalties that can be imposed on individuals and organisations that, by their acts or omissions, put others at risk.

Employees have a legal duty to co-operate with their employer in ensuring the health and safety of their workplace. This involves taking reasonable care to protect not only themselves but also others. They must also obey reasonable instructions in relation to health and safety.

Workers assisting others with their personal care needs must be physically capable of performing all aspects of the task. If they are not then they will obviously be at a higher risk of sustaining injury or injuring the person they are assisting. The responsibility for ensuring that you are physically capable of performing the job is two fold.

Employers need to ensure appropriate selection criteria are established to determine a worker’s physical capacity prior to employment. Employees should inform their employer if they have a problem, which is current or likely to interfere with their ability to assist others in the future with their personal care needs.

This is a regulatory responsibility, which can attract penalties if it is ignored.

When providing care assistance to people, you are likely to transfer and move the person you are assisting. There are three main ways a
worker may receive physical injury while involved in the lifting or moving of people. It can be from:

- A single traumatic accident,
- From a series of minor accidents that result in cumulative damage
- Cumulative damage to continuous exposure to activities that place strain on your body.

**Manual Handling; largest single cause of work related injuries**

Safe transfers and Manual Handling are of major importance to you in your career as a care/support worker. There is also the benefit that applies to your personal life.

Occupational Health and Safety Research, within the Health Industry, has shown that back injuries are the largest single cause of work related injuries accounting for 1/3 of all compensated injuries and almost 50% of compensation costs.

**Personal costs**

Personal costs include pain and suffering, poor sex life, strained relationships, and disruption to family life, social life and possible loss of career. For nurses, at least 40% of compensated injuries are back injuries.

Under the Occupational Health and Safety legislation and Government policies, a committed, pro-active and on-going preventative approach is required.

**Back pain**

Low back pain is a major occupational health and safety problem in Australia. It has been linked to not only manual handling injuries, but also to postural problems and accidents such as slips, trips and falls.

Back injuries do not only occur at work, many of the every day activities we carry out at home doing housework, gardening and odd repair jobs etc., can lead to one of the types of injuries described.

Therefore it is important that we take care of our backs at all times, not just during the working day. This approach should include:

- Being conscious of maintaining good posture when sitting, standing, lying and walking.
- Avoiding or reducing the strain from repetitive activities
- Maintaining healthy and fit bodies
- Always using correct manual handling techniques.

While providing assistance to other people, it is very important for both you, and the client’s health that you take care with postural positions when lifting or moving people and equipment.

**What are musculoskeletal injuries**

Work Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSD) describes a group of workplace injuries and diseases related to the soft tissue structures of the body including bones, muscles, ligaments, tendons and discs in the spine. WMSD can occur suddenly or they can take long periods to develop and recover. Manual tasks are a common cause of WMSD.

The two main subgroups of WMSD are:

- back injuries and
- upper limb injuries.
Back injuries

Low back pain is the most common and costly of work-related musculoskeletal disorders. Other back injuries include:

- spinal disc rupture (particularly of the lower lumbar spine)
- nerve compression (the most common is sciatica nerve pain)
- muscle spasm of the back/hip muscles
- aggravation of a pre-existing degenerative condition.

Upper limb injuries

Upper limb injuries are common in keyboard work and processing, production and manufacturing industries. They affect nearly all soft tissues of the upper limb (including muscles, tendons, tendon sheaths, nerves and blood vessels) and may affect the lower limb.

Common injuries include tendon disorders (like tendonitis), nerve disorders (like carpal tunnel syndrome) and neurovascular disorders (like Raynaud’s Syndrome which affects the circulatory and nervous systems).

Upper limb injuries are caused by:

- repetitive motions (such as packing or sorting)
- static postures or sustained exertions (such as gripping and manipulating a hand tool that is too big)
- forceful exertions (such as lifting a heavy load or cutting with a blunt knife).
- vibration
- compression or contact stress (caused by hard or sharp edges)
- awkward postures
- working in low temperatures
- prolonged duration and frequency of work
- psychosocial stresses.

Good handling

Good handling technique is obviously a major factor in avoiding injury and in the next section we include some examples of how this should be achieved. Employers will also need to consider individual capability. The guidelines below will give reasonable protection to nearly all men and around 1/2 to 2/3 of all women.

To provide similar protection to all women, weight guidelines must be reduced by around one third. These guidelines are also for infrequent operations - about 30 per hour - and where employees can work to their own pace with adequate pauses. As a rough guide, weights must be reduced by 30% if the operation is repeated once or twice per minute; by 50% if the operation is repeated 5-8 times a minute and by 80% when the operation is repeated more than 12 times per minute.

You are governed by:

- Manual Handling Regulations And Code Of Practice
- Manual Handling Regulations And Code Of Practice

Employees’ Obligations

Employees must co-operate with the employer in any systems provided for staff safety. For example: if a hoist has been provided for lifting people it must be used when appropriate, and in conjunction with a care plan.

All employees should advise their employers if they have any medical or health problems or concerns, which would place them at risk of injury when lifting or moving people.

Employees must assess risks and make decisions to act in the interest of their own health and safety.

You must be aware of them. It is your obligation.

The Manual Handling Regulations and the Codes of Practice is there to:

- Prevent the occurrence of injury and to reduce the severity of injuries resulting from manual handling tasks in the workplace.
- Require employers to identify, assess and control risks arising from manual handling tasks in the workplace.

Key considerations for you to think about:

1. Manual Handling Operations; What is it?
2. Manual Handling Operations Regulations; What is it?
3. Why is it important?
4. Who is affected/most at risk?
5. What does the law say?
6. What can be done?
7. Consider whether mechanical handling aids could be used.
8. What specific areas should assessment look at?
Good practice

How can you eliminate or avoid the risks from manual handling?

There are some basic principles that everyone should observe prior to carrying out a manual handling operation. Make sure you know what they are and how to implement them not just under normal circumstances but under as many variables as possible.

Basic Manual Handling Rules

1. always look for a better way of doing things to avoid manual handling risks
2. place or store heavy objects at waist level
3. use good lifting techniques
4. watch where you are going when carrying a load
5. move your feet to turn. avoid twisting while bent over
6. make sure you have a good grip on your load - and that it will not fall apart and has no sharp edges
7. have the right equipment available
8. prepare for the moving of the load.
9. wear old clothes or protective gear when you handle dirty loads
10. stop physical work if you are tired and fatigued, and REPORT to supervisor

Injury Management and Rehabilitation

Vocational Rehabilitation Services assist the employee and the employer in situations where work injury has occurred or if there is a risk of work injury.

If you been injured at work?

If you have sustained an injury at work you may be experiencing difficulties in returning to your normal job. There may be a number of reasons preventing you from returning to work such as:

- Pain and physical restrictions
- Stress and anxiety
- Lack of suitable duties
- Unsuitable equipment for the job
- Issues in the workplace

To assist you to overcome such difficulties and help you to return to work quickly and safely you may need the support of an accredited rehabilitation provider. Under the WorkCover legislation you have the right to choose your own provider.

Organisations such as Enable Consultation Services (Rehabilitation Unit) can assist you to return to work safely under the management of your doctor by assessing:

- the safety of your work environment
- the physical and psychological demands of the job
- the availability of suitable duties

These assessments will help your doctor make decisions about the management of your return to work. Often you will need our ongoing assistance which may include:

- education on the management of your injury
- modifications to the job or workplace
- assistance in the management of pain and or depression
- resolving conflicts in workplace

In helping you return to work quickly and safely we also need to work with other key parties such as your employer, the Insurer and other health practitioners.

What if you can't get back to work

If you are unable to return to your pre-injury job, due to the nature of your injury, we can assist you to find a new job. This usually involves a number of steps such as:

- Assessing your career interests and skills
- Accessing new training opportunities
- Job seeking skills training
- Use of employment incentives schemes
- Our commitment to you
For Employers/Organisations managing injured workers

Vocational Rehabilitation Services can provide
- Return to Work/Occupational Rehabilitation
- Workplace & Functional Assessment Services
- Employment & Training Services
- Conflict Resolution Services
- OH&S & Ergonomic Services
- Advice on safe workplaces and practices.

For the worker this means;

- an assessment of their work abilities
- assessment and counselling to identify the jobs that would best suit them
- counselling to talk about their disability (support, management strategies, services available)
- programs to help them get ready for work
- confidence building/self esteem sessions
- assistance to help find a job (e.g. looking for the right jobs, writing applications, resume writing, job interview skills)
- assessing different workplaces to identify the right workplace for them (identifying the right job that suits your skills, setting up support structures, putting in place equipment and technology if needed)
- on the job training at their current workplace and/or short training courses to help them do their job.

Even if you already have a job, and it is at risk of being lost because of your disability, a Vocational Rehabilitation Service can help.

Call Jayne Tibbenham Injury Management Manager at Enable Consultation Services (Rehabilitation Unit) on 08 84472477

To discuss assistance with manual handling and injury management issues.
Follow Safe Manual Handling Practices

This book is designed for anybody who as part of their work routines and procedures has to carry manual handling duties in a safe manner.

Trainers, supervisors, workers, service personnel and students will all find this a valuable resource and tool that will assist them in a number of applications such as:

- clarifying how and why organisational policies and procedures are critical for work
- what the legislative framework for manual handling can include in Australia
- how to minimise the risks of lifting (adopting a no lift mentality), and what correct lifting techniques you can adopt to minimise the potential of injury
- when and why personal safety equipment is required
- in the event of an injury at work occurring, what workplace practices and procedures are available to you for reporting symptoms and injuries and responsibilities of all parties
- what return to work programmes may need to be followed.

Your back and body is a priceless asset, so my advice is to keep it working and keep it pain free.

If you care about your back and the safety of your peers and clients, you will do whatever it takes to preserve everybody’s health and safety.

Remember that your ability to work beyond this moment is determined by the actions you do today.

By reading and completing the exercises in this resource you will effectively be participating in a course that would normally take far longer to master.

It has, like all our resources been written to address the performance criteria in this unit.

The assessments provide many opportunities to have skills checked off by supervisors as well as opportunities to use case studies and projects.

Please enjoy the article on Safe Manual Handling and feel free to distribute it to anybody who may be interested in the program. We can also provide specialist trainers on this topic should you need that type of assistance.
CHCOHS302A
PARTICIPATE IN SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR DIRECT CARE WORK

This book teaches Community Workers to deliver services in a safe way.

This book is specifically designed to cater for workers who deliver aged care or disabilities services, this is an alternative unit to: CHCOHS301A Participate in workplace safety procedures, focusing on the hands on worker who is indirect contact with people with all types of disabilities, and conditions.

It contains updated and additional material for people working in community care, aged care and disability care sectors to be able to accurately identify the major occupational health and safety hazards associated with manual handling, together with other hazards that may include dealing with aggressive behaviors, stress, infection and so forth.

The material will also support the worker be able to assess related risk, as well as follow instructions and procedures with minimal supervision and support.

The worker will be capable of participating and contributing to OHS management issues.

The assessment has been streamlined and the option of a multiple choice special section is available for people wishing to be assessed on manual handling. This assessment takes only a few minutes to administer and be checked.
Commonwealth Department of Veterans Affairs; Back to Basics; 2002.

De Maria Antonio; Implement and monitor infection control policy and procedures HLTIN3A Enable Research and Publishing SA; 2007 edition.

De Maria Antonio; Participate In Safety Procedures for Direct Care Work CHCOHS302A Enable Research and Publishing SA; 2006 edition.

De Maria Antonio; Implement and monitor ohs policies and procedures for a work place CHCOHS401A Enable Research and Publishing SA; 2006 edition.

De Maria Antonio; Manual Handling and People Transfers for Workers and Other People Movers; 2006 edition.


Guichard, C and Hogan, M, Manual Handling Changing Nursing Culture, Australian Nursing Federation (SA Branch), November 1995


