

Manual Handling of Patients



This guide is prepared by
the Occupational Safety and Health Branch,
Labour Department

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This guidebook is issued free of charge and can be obtained from offices of the Occupational Safety and Health Branch, Labour Department. It can also be downloaded from website of the Labour Department at <http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/oh/OHB57b.pdf>. Addresses and telephone numbers of the offices can be found in website of the Department at <http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/tele/osh.htm> or call 2559 2297.

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Are you the victim?



One day, Ah Mei returned from work as usual, but she was not feeling well. At night her back pain was so serious that she could not fall asleep and had to seek treatment at the accident and emergency department of a hospital. In fact, Ah Mei sprained her back that afternoon while she was helping a patient get out of his bed. She felt pain in her back and immediately informed her supervisor. After resting for a while, she felt alright and continued with her work again.

The accident happened a few months ago. During her sick leave in these few months, Ah Mei had to regularly consult a doctor and undergo sessions of physiotherapy. However, up to now she has not yet fully recovered. Neither could she do household work nor give her baby a hug. She used to be energetic and extrovert, but now she could only stay at home in low spirit, for she was unable to go travelling and mountaineering as she did in the past, and she even had difficulty in playing mahjong.





To avoid a recurrence of her injury, Ah Mei contemplated changing her job after recovery, but she was worried that she could not find one with similar pay. Although Ah Mei could receive compensation for her injury, she always felt that this could not compensate for her physical and psychological traumas.

The injury also affected Ah Mei's supervisor, Mrs Lam. The department under her charge lost an experienced and diligent worker, and there was a need to immediately train another worker to take up Ah Mei's job. This has a significant bearing on the operation of the whole department.



No matter whether you are an employer or employee, have you ever imagined that this might happen to you? In fact, the incident could have been completely avoided if you had paid attention to the correct methods for the manual handling of patients.



Common Causes of Musculoskeletal Disorders

Awkward postures in handling patients are likely to cause injuries such as sprains, strains and back injuries. Some injuries will cause instant pain; but in some cases, pains may arise after working for a period of time. Common causes of musculoskeletal disorders are:

■ Overloading the back



Excessive bending to help a bedridden patient to sit up will cause great stress to the back.

■ Excessive twisting and over-reaching of the back, wrist or neck

Helping a patient to transfer from a bed to a wheelchair, an employee has to make a lot of twisting and turning movements that are likely to cause injuries.



■ Transporting a patient in the wrong manner

In a handling operation that involves a patient relying on auxiliary medical equipment, extra care should be taken in order to avoid accidents.



■ Unforeseen situations

Unexpected weight bearing will cause injuries to the employee.



■ Lifting operations that exceed employees' individual capability

Handling tasks that exceed one's physical limits may cause injuries to oneself and other people.





■ Insufficient space



Insufficient space may prevent the employee from maintaining a correct and safe posture.

■ Wet or slippery floors or other obstacles

Wet or slippery floor increases the risk of accidents.



Managing Manual Handling of Patients

■ Conducting an assessment beforehand



The responsible person should conduct a safety and health assessment on the work processes for handling patients, and take effective preventive and protective measures.

Before handling a patient, individual employees should make an on-the-spot assessment to work out the best way for carrying out the task.





■ Tasks



Reduce the risk of injury by applying correct methods and safe handling techniques.





Using suitable mechanical aids reduces risks.



Adjusting the working height of a transfer on the same level reduces the risk of injury.

■ Reducing the load



Using a light mobile chair with wheels reduces the load as no lifting or pulling is required.



Share the load by team lifting.



Making use of mechanical aids can reduce the effort required. (Please note that the lifting equipment should not be overloaded and it should be regularly checked and properly maintained.)



■ The working environment



Provision of sufficient space can avoid incorrect postures, and passageways should always be kept clear of obstructions.

Warning signs should be placed on slippery floor and spilled water be promptly cleared.



Provision of sufficient lighting may reduce the risk of striking against objects and tripping.



■ Individual capability



Assign employees with suitable tasks that are commensurate with their individual capabilities. Encourage them to use auxiliary equipment, mechanical aids and team lifting.



The responsible person must provide employees with appropriate training so that they know the principles and techniques of safe handling of patients and the proper use of mechanical aids.



■ Other matters

Wearing appropriate clothes can avoid obstructing correct postures and movements.



Mechanical aids must be regularly maintained and repaired to ascertain that wheels of chairs, trolleys and beds are functioning well so as to reduce the effort required and the risk of bodily injuries.



Further information

For further information or assistance, you can contact the Occupational Safety and Health Branch, Labour Department.

Address :15/F, Harbour Building, 38 Pier Road,
Central, Hong Kong
Telephone :2852 4041
Fax :2581 2049
Home page address :<http://www.labour.gov.hk>
E-mail address :enquiry@labour.gov.hk

Any employee suspected to have an occupational disease may go to the Labour Department's occupational health clinic for treatment.

Address :2/F, Kwun Tong Jockey Club Health Centre,
457 Kwun Tong Road, Kowloon
(Next to Kwun Tong MTR)
Telephone :2343 7133

Information on the services offered by the Occupational Safety and Health Council can be obtained through their hotline at 2739 9000.

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