



Safe patient handling¹

Preamble

A safe patient handling policy provides for a safer approach to patient/client handling whereby the manual lifting of patients/clients is eliminated or minimised wherever possible and so far as reasonably practicable. The ANMF *Safe patient handling* policy promotes the performance of comprehensive patient assessment and the use of mechanical lifting aids and other equipment to assist nursing and midwifery staff in the moving, transferring, mobilisation and handling of patients/clients, to ensure that minimal force or exertion of the body is experienced by nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing* when performing patient handling tasks whilst ensuring patient safety.

It is the policy of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation that:

- Maintenance of a person's independence by encouraging mobility is a priority of nursing and midwifery.
- Patients should be encouraged to assist in the performance of their own transfers², including bearing their own weight, as much as possible.
- The manual lifting of patients must be eliminated in all but exceptional circumstances, for example, life threatening situations where it still should be minimised so far as reasonably practicable.
- Employers and designers must provide a workplace that is safe and without risks to health, including provision of safely designed premises, work environments, facilities, fixtures, fittings, equipment and systems of work that do not create, contribute to, or exacerbate, patient handling risks.
- Employers must provide such information, instruction, training and/or supervision as is necessary in order for nurses and midwives to perform their work in a way that is safe and without risks to health.
- Employers must provide appropriate financial resourcing in order to achieve a healthy and safe workplace.
- Staff ratios and skill mix must be adequate to reflect the dependency levels and handling needs of patients and to ensure the safe use of aids and equipment.
- The principles of safe patient handling are equally applicable to the care of patients with bariatric needs. The assessment of the provision of equipment for patients with bariatric needs must include safe workload for the patient weight, size and body shape requirements.
- The manual handling needs of the person should be assessed and documented prior to admission or, if this is not practicable, as soon as possible after admission to a health or aged care service³. This assessment should include risk factors to the carer as well as the patient, including risks from:

*The term assistant in nursing also refers to care workers (however titled)



- sustained awkward postures
- bending
- twisting
- person's previous history of falls
- the duration and frequency of the hazardous manual task
- the design of the work area
- the layout of the workplace
- the systems of work used
- the nature, size, weight or number of persons, or things involved in carrying out the hazardous manual task

Assessment should also include the person's ability to:

- assist in their own transfers
 - comprehend and cooperate
 - manoeuvre their own weight, weight bear, stand with or without a gait aide
- Assessment of the manual handling and equipment needs of the person should be conducted throughout the patient journey and be carried out by or in consultation with registered nurses or midwives involved in the care of that person, in conjunction with a physiotherapist when necessary, and ensure that nurses, midwives or assistants in nursing are not placed at unacceptable risk.
 - Where such an assessment identifies that handling aids are required, these must be supplied by the employer and be easily accessible to registered nurses or midwives involved in the care of that person. Handling aids may assist with transfers onto or out of bed or trolley, bed to chair, and with moves up, down and around the bed and they assist with other person handling activities. Aids include electronically operated lifting machines and hoists, motorised trolleys and wheelchairs, overhead tracking, and rigid or fabric sliding devices.
 - The provision of ceiling hoist technology and air assisted patient lifting devices should be considered as the first line handling aid by employers as significant evidence exists that their use reduces operator and patient injuries. Overhead tracking should be installed in all new or refurbished facilities. This should cover beds as a minimum, but should extend to ensuites and other areas of the facility where patients are likely to require assistance.
 - Once an assessment has been made that equipment should be used for safe patient handling then equipment should be made available and used, even in situations where the patient and/or family's preference is for it not to be used.
 - All patient handling needs must be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.
 - Health, aged care and community services should include a Safe patient handling policy in their manual handling policy. Policy principles should be conveyed to patients, family and carers to eliminate circumstances where the patient and family's preference is for equipment not to be used.



ANMF Policy

- Employers are required by regulation to identify, assess and control risk associated with all hazardous manual handling activities in the workplace. Such hazard identification, risk assessment and control must be carried out in consultation with nursing, midwifery and care staff and health and safety representatives.
- Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing must comply with policies and procedures established by the employer, in consultation with all staff and their representatives, in order to manage risks and eliminate, wherever possible, or reduce occupational health and safety risks associated with patient handling activities.
- Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing and nursing and midwifery managers must receive induction and continuing education and training in:
 - occupational health and safety rights and responsibilities;
 - occupational health and safety policies and procedures;
 - assessment of the handling needs of patients;
 - patient handling risk factors and hazards;
 - patient handling risk management techniques and processes i.e. assessment of needs and abilities in particular;
 - correct use of handling aids and other manual handling equipment; and
 - task specific techniques for moving, handling and transferring of patients that eliminate lifting and minimise risk in performance of task.
- Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing and their representatives should be involved in risk control strategies including the selection of handling aids and other equipment, fittings, and facility and furniture designed to control manual handling risks.
- Equipment such as handling aids should be trialled before purchase to evaluate their capacity to meet the requirements of both the person being handled and the staff using the equipment within the environment where it is to be utilised. In consultation with HSRs and the nursing/midwifery and care staff concerned, modifications to the workplace should be carried out where necessary to ensure a safe working environment.
- Floor surfaces should be smooth and even and push/pull forces when using wheeled equipment should be such that risks of manual handling incidents and/or injury are reduced as far as possible.
- All equipment must be maintained and inspected to ensure it is in good working order and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Patient lifting slings must be inspected prior to each use. Adequate and safe storage space for equipment must be provided.
- The workplace, including patient's homes, must provide adequately modified clear space for: the safe movement and/or transfer of patients; the safe use of handling aids and other equipment; and the safe and accessible storage of handling aids and other equipment.
- Following a patient handling incident and/or injury, staff should report the incident/injury and employers must initiate a hazard identification, risk assessment and risk control process to eliminate or reduce the risks of another occupational incident and/or injury.



- Research in developing and implementing strategies to prevent and reduce occupational manual handling injuries suffered by nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing should be promoted and conducted.

Developed August 2008

Adopted by Federal Executive November 2008

Reviewed and re-endorsed May 2012

Reviewed and re-endorsed November 2015

Reviewed and re-endorsed November 2018

References

1. This policy refers to the manual handling of patients or clients. Please refer to the ANMF policy on *Occupational health and safety* for further information on hazardous manual tasks generally.
2. For example, moving from bed to chair, bed to trolley, and moving up or down the bed
3. Includes patients receiving health or aged care services at home