



Safe patient handlingⁱ

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. The ANMF *Safe patient handling* policy promotes the use of mechanical lifting aids and other equipment to assist nursing and midwifery staff in the moving, transferring and handling of patients/clients, to ensure that minimal force or exertion of the body or awkward and potentially dangerous postures are employed by nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing when handling patients.

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

1. Maintenance of a person's independence by encouraging mobility is a priority of nursing and midwifery.
2. People should be encouraged to assist in their own transfersⁱⁱ, including bearing their own weight, as much as possible.
3. The manual lifting of people must be eliminated in all but exceptional circumstances, for example, life threatening situations.
4. Employers 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.
5. 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.
6. Employers must provide appropriate financial resourcing in order to achieve a healthy and safe workplace.
7. Staffing level and skill mix should be adequate to reflect the dependency levels and handling needs of people and to ensure the safe use of aids and equipment.
8. The principles of safe patient handling are equally applicable to the care of bariatric patients.
9. 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 serviceⁱⁱⁱ. This assessment should include risk factors to the carer, including risks from:
 - sustained awkward postures
 - bending
 - twisting
 - persons previous history of falls



Assessment should also include the persons ability to:

- assist in their own transfers
 - comprehend and cooperate
 - manoeuvre their own weight, weight bear, stand with or without a gait aide
10. Assessment of the manual handling needs of the person should be carried out by 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.
 11. Where such an assessment identifies that handling aids are required, these must be supplied by the employer and easily accessible. Handling aids 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.
 12. The provision of ceiling hoist technology should be considered as the first line handling aid by employers as significant evidence exists that their use reduces operator and patient injuries.
 13. All patient handling needs must be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.
 14. Health, aged care and community services should include a Safe patient handling policy in their manual handling policy.
 15. 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 and midwifery staff and health and safety representatives.
 16. 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 eliminate, wherever possible, or reduce occupational health and safety risks associated with patient handling activities^{iv}.
 17. 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 patient handling needs of people;
 - 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



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- techniques for moving or transferring patients eliminating lifting wherever possible.
18. 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.
 19. 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.
 20. All equipment must be maintained in good working order and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
 21. The workplace, including people's homes, must provide adequately modified clear space for: the safe movement and/or transfer of people; the safe use of handling aids and other equipment; and the safe and accessible storage of handling aids and other equipment.
 22. Following a patient handling injury, employers must initiate a hazard identification, risk assessment and risk control process to eliminate or reduce the risks of another occupational injury.
 23. 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.

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References

1. This policy refers to the manual handling of patients or clients. Please refer to the ANMF policy on *Occupational health and safety* and to state and territory occupational health and safety legislation for further information
2. For example, moving from bed to chair, bed to trolley, and moving up or down the bed
3. Includes people receiving health or aged care services at home
4. Any references to 'Occupational health and safety' and 'OHS' are intended to be used interchangeably with the phrase 'Work health and safety' and 'WHS'