

Safe Patient Handling Program implementation is underway

by Sharon Haney, RN, MSN, 8 North Tower

ACCORDING TO THE American Nurses Association, the physical demands of the nursing profession have forced many nurses to leave the profession due to complaints of chronic back pain or injuries. Lifting, transferring and repositioning patients are the most common tasks that lead to injury.

Recently, a Six Sigma team analyzed the causes of nursing back injuries at NCBH. After conducting pilot studies on patient care areas 4 Reynolds Tower-IMC, 4 Ardmore Tower, 8 North Tower-Renal and 4C-ICU—with great success—implementation of a Medical Center-wide Safe Patient Handling Program has begun.

This comprehensive program is designed to help prevent musculoskeletal injuries to the frontline healthcare providers. Safe patient handling is becoming a best practice in health care. The Veteran's Admin-

istration has conducted extensive research and developed an evidence-based program that is being used as a model at hospitals nationwide.

Our Six Sigma team has developed a minimal lift program based on these practices:

- Implement a safe patient handling policy
- Have lift and transfer equipment available on each nursing unit
- Provide training on equipment and patient assessment
- Provide algorithms to help staff use the equipment effectively

The main goals and benefits for establishing this program are:

- To help prevent back injuries among staff. It will take fewer personnel to perform a lift when using an assistive device.
- To promote safety and comfort for patients. Assistive equipment contributes to

Six Sigma Fast Facts

- Margin improvement: \$5,741,257
- Active projects: 67
- Completed projects: 66

Last update: 6/1/07

the prevention of skin tears, contusions and improves patient safety, comfort and dignity.

- To help recruit and retain nursing staff.

The pre-implementation phase is scheduled for June 12-14. During this phase, the unit managers will meet with representatives from Prevent, Inc.'s "Get A Lift!"[™] to finalize the number and types of equipment needed for each patient care area.