

Patient Handling

Patient handling is a complex task that Emergency Service Organizations (ESOs) undertake every day. However, the basics of patient handling are often taken for granted and associated incidents can result in injury and damage to the responder, the patient, and the organization.

Industry statistics show that injuries to emergency service responders are significantly higher than the average occupational injury rate, as recorded in the Bureau of Labor Statistics database. Additionally, VFIS claims experience reports that patient handling incidents are a leading cause for claims of negligence. To help reduce these numbers, VFIS encourages ESOs to consider the following risk factors and recommendations.

Risk Factors

The incidence of patient handling events can be attributed to several areas.

- Lack of understanding of the complexities of patient handling
- Lack of knowledge and training
- Lack of situational awareness and identification of scene hazards
- Improper lifting techniques
- Not following manufacturer recommendations
- Using equipment in ways not recommended by the manufacturer or not using the equipment best suited for the job. Examples include:
 - Using a household chair as a patient carrying device
 - Using a wheelchair or stretcher on steps
 - Not using a lap-safety belt on a patient in a wheelchair
 - Not using all stretcher straps, specifically, the shoulder restraint system
 - Rolling a stretcher with a patient side-ways
 - Not having 2 trained responders in contact with stretcher loaded with a patient
 - Improper equipment repair and maintenance

Recommendations

Consider the following general rules for safe patient handling.

- Provide initial and ongoing patient handling education and training
- Assess the location for environmental and situational hazards and adjust the task accordingly
- Know the physical capabilities of the crew
- Know the weight you are lifting
- Utilize proper lifting techniques and body mechanics
- Use equipment properly, for example:
 - Use equipment per manufacturer guidelines
 - Utilize all straps including shoulder straps on the stretcher
 - Roll the stretcher with the patient at waist level and, for certain situations such as a larger or uncooperative patient, lower the stretcher to its lowest level
 - Place a safety belt on a patient before moving them in a wheelchair
 - Ensure there are adequate resources to make the lift safely
- Follow manufacturer recommendations for routine and preventative maintenance

Summary

Repetitive motions, sprains, strains, and tears are among the most common types of workplace injuries. By nature of the job, emergency responders have an increased risk of sustaining these types of traumas, confirming the significance of proper patient handling. Improper patient handling also leads to a substantial number of negligence claims. To help reduce these occurrences, it is important to utilize proper patient handling techniques in all response situations.