

7 Manual handling in theatres and staff security

Background

Name: Jane McCormick

Safety representative: 10 years

Job-title: Theatre Sister

Employer: NHS Lanarkshire (Monklands Hospital), Scotland

Setting/speciality: Acute



“I always had a natural interest in health and safety (H&S). I transferred from nights to day duty, and had responsibility for H&S in my department, but I felt I needed special training in order to take on the role. I was able to obtain this via the RCN, hence I became a safety representative. What motivates me to carry on is the impact you can have on creating a healthy working environment for staff and patients alike.

Identifying the problem

The first area I tackled was manual handling in our department. In particular, the lifting of heavy instruments, and transferring from sterilisation service containers to be stored in department and vice versa. The containers were deep drums and staff had to stoop to lift the heavy trays out. There were many resulting back injuries.

We started by undertaking a risk assessment, and I involved the trust safety adviser. I also brought in the moving and handling adviser. We gathered together all the information needed to put forward a business case, including details of the weights and height of involved in lifting.

Taking action

I brought the issue to the attention of our monthly surgical H&S sub-group. I kept highlighting it as an issue and worked to gather all the facts and figures needed. It took a lot of working out who the right people where to get involved. You need to have good liaison with appropriate people in this role. You also need to be prepared to be persistent, and if necessary ‘be a nagger’. It can take courage to do it. You can’t just sit back and accept things; you’ve got to do the homework to get improvements.

Changes made

We highlighted issues and problems to the service managers and then discussed it with the company supplying the instruments as it was their containers being used. As a result, the company changed the design of the containers, introduced new trolleys, which made it much easier to remove/insert the equipment without stooping. I had the opportunity to see the trolleys before they were introduced. They also reduced the weight of some of the trays. The changes made were across all three sites.

Benefits

Now staff no longer have to bend down to lift these heavy instrument trays. They are not required to stack bins upon bins. Everything is on mobile trolleys now and involves straight transfers.

There was a clear benefit not just to the staff, but to the trust as well, as fewer staff were off sick as a result of back injury. There has also been a reduction in breakage of instruments (telescopes etc) as they are able to store them more securely, and there are fewer problems with loading/unloading. Lighter instruments are secured into place with a lock on them, resulting in instruments not being broken.

Other issues – staff security

For years since I first started as representative I've raised staff security as an issue. It's a matter of making sure things are kept on the agenda. Several checks have been done which have highlighted various problems.

It's just been announced that we are to have a £1.3m investment to install security equipment such as camera systems, swipe card entrance to wards etc, it's really good news for the staff."

Becoming a RCN safety representative

If you are interested in becoming a safety representative you can find further information on the RCN website www.rcn.org.uk/support/becoming_activist/how_to_become_a_representative