

Giving a Lift to Nursing Education

Teaching tomorrow's nurses best-practice patient handling skills.

? **Moving patients presents a risk of injury to caregivers and patients. In recent years technologies such as overhead lifting devices have been introduced to manage the risk. But how are nursing schools dealing with the rapid evolution of best practices in this area?**

One example involves the recent upgrading of two nursing practice laboratories at Okanagan University College (OUC), in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada, which prepares nurses and other health care workers. Installing four ceiling track lifts and adding various transfer-assist devices have helped students better prepare for the workplace. Also, arrangements have been made for in-service education by the Interior Health Authority (IH) and other area employers to be conducted in the newly equipped laboratories. This sharing of resources and space helps to foster the relationship between the school and organizations like IH, the largest employer of OUC graduates.

Upgrading the OUC laboratories continued a collaboration begun in 2000 when OUC invited IH occupational health and safety staff to teach patient-handling techniques to OUC fac-

ulty. Represented were programs for baccalaureate nurses, practical nurses, home support-resident care attendants, and rehabilitation assistants. Some went on to participate in IH's training sessions for patient handling, while learning about the latest research, current methods, and equipment. They and front line staff worked on ways to overcome barriers to moving patients.

The partnership expanded in late 2003 when the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) of British Columbia agreed to fund overhead patient-lifting equipment in OUC laboratories. The WCB's involvement resulted from its determination to partner with other agencies to reduce high injury rates among health care workers caused by handling patients. The WCB sees the OUC-IH collaboration as a positive model for other schools of nursing in the province.

The OUC nursing program is the first in British Columbia that has a curriculum and laboratory equipment that harmonize with regional best practices for patient handling based on a "no lift" approach to safety. Overhead lifts are used in 75% of IH long-term care and extended-care beds. A unique aspect of the curriculum is its focus on decision-making skills based on both assessment and awareness of safely using the body to move people and objects.

The immediate goal of this collaboration is to produce graduates skilled and ready to apply best practices. A broader objec-

Working on ways to overcome barriers to moving patients.

tive is to create a body of knowledge to be shared with other health care educators and employers. Over time, how the collaboration affects OUC graduates and their employers will be evaluated independently by the Occupational Health and Safety Agency for Healthcare in British Columbia, which is dedicated to improving workplace safety in health care and to returning injured health care workers to their jobs quickly and safely.

Like everyone associated with this project, we are excited by the advances and look forward to what will be accomplished—nurses and other health care workers being prepared to protect their safety and their patients, research on the long-term effects of the curriculum, and continued development as technology and best practices evolve. We hope others see the benefits of safer patient care and increased staff safety through the partnership of an educational institution, a major health employer, and a regulatory agency. ▼

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