

Long-Term Healthcare

Targeted Inspections on Musculoskeletal Injury
(MSI) Risk Factors

Winter/Spring 2016

- Nova Scotia's Workplace Safety Strategy identified healthcare as an industry sector requiring increased focus on improving compliance to health and safety regulations and return-to-work outcomes.
- Statistics show that time-loss injuries involving soft tissue or musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs) and half of all MSI claims are linked to some type of manual lift or patient transfer tasks.
- The Occupational Health & Safety Division of the Department of Labour and Advanced Education (LAE) conducted targeted inspections with a focus on patient lift and transfer from March to June 2016 at 36 of 130 facilities providing long-term care.

Goals and objectives

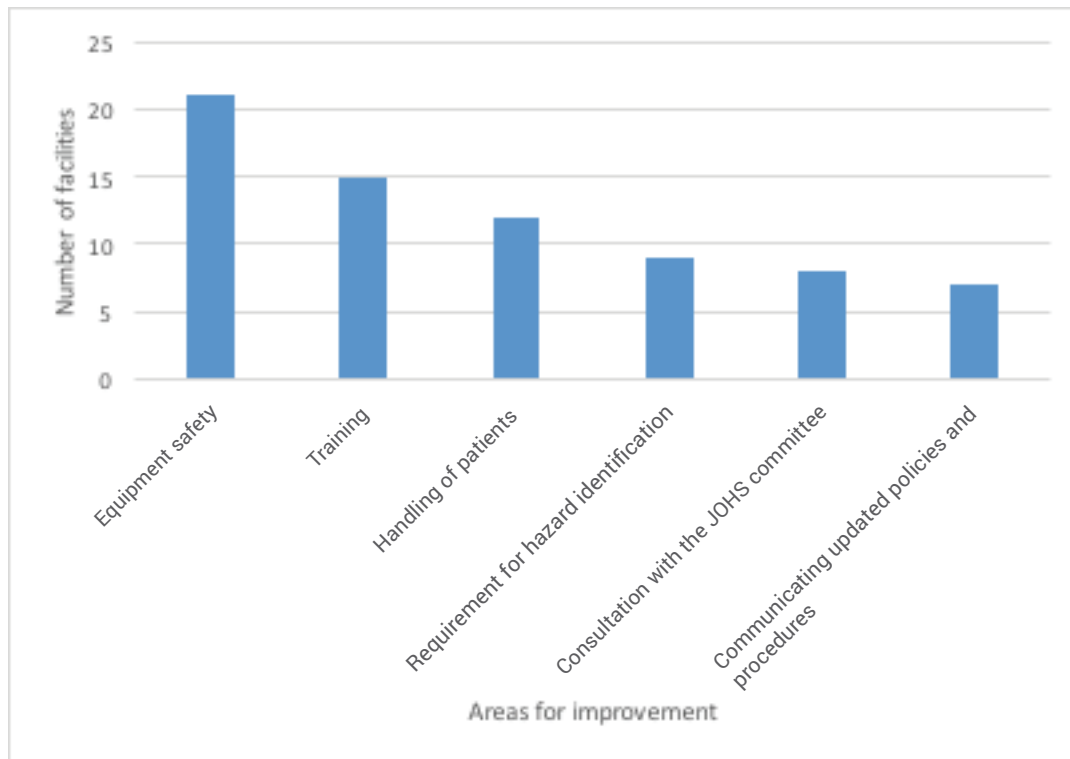
- Engage both employees and employers in discussions about health and safety programs for their facilities with a focus on patient transfers, the equipment used and staff training for those that use or handle any patient transfer.
- Promote general OHS compliance and awareness within the long-term care sector.
- Recognize the good efforts that already exist and identify areas for improvement.

Context

- The information collected was not designed to be statistically representative of the industry but rather provide indicators of the challenges as they pertain to MSI.
- All facilities were provided notice of the inspections but only 36 of 130 facilities were visited.
- Selected facilities were those required to have an Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) program based on employee numbers.

Findings

The table below shows the number of facilities of the 36 visited and specific area for improvement:



General Observations:

Equipment Safety

Regular equipment inspections are important to avoid unexpected failure and to ensure components are in proper working order and their integrity is not compromised. When equipment is not in proper operating condition then lock-out procedures need to be in place and understood by staff to prevent unintended use when it is not safe to do so.

Understanding and awareness of equipment safety and proper use is a critical part of working smart to avoid injuries. This includes having policies and procedures in place that support equipment inspections, use and assessments.

21 of 36 inspected facilities had a gap in their equipment maintenance and inspection program and this needs to be improved upon.

Training

Training is an important aspect of any workplace. It is important to ensure that people have the proper training to use equipment in their workplace and understand their rights and responsibilities for safety as well as other roles associated with OHS programs in their workplace.

All facilities have some of these programs in place, however, the overall level of training was inconsistent between facilities with limited opportunities for retraining noted. This was highlighted when work place methods or procedures being used were either contrary to or not aligned completely with the training material provided.

Handling of Patients

There are a variety of methods and options used to handle patients depending upon the situation. A review of the situation may in fact limit options for staff to complete the task. In choosing the best solution several factors need to first be considered. A thorough assessment of the work function is needed to identify the best option for handling patients.

Most facilities inspected are implementing or moving towards better processes that will allow them to make the best decision on patient handling while preventing injuries.

Hazard Identification

Employers and employees need to evaluate their workplace for hazards and then collaboratively develop mitigation for the hazards.

Once identified, hazards need to be addressed in a timely fashion. This is an important part of an effective OHS program and requires support from both parties to be effective.

JOHS Committee

JOHS committees play an integral role in an effective workplace safety program. This requires effort on the part of both employers and employees and is a critical aspect of the Internal Responsibility System. A well-defined OHS program with clear and available policies supported by an effective JOHS committee is needed.

Most facilities have active JOHS committees, however, they are not always being fully utilized for OHS matters such as reviewing injuries, developing hazard mitigations and reviewing the effectiveness of the overall OHS program.

Communicating and Updating Policies/Procedures

Continuous improvement is a key principle for OHS to support workplace safety and an overall commitment to safety. As policies and procedures are reviewed and updated the information needs to be shared in a manner that reaches all employees. This would include reviews of safe work procedures, staff training and awareness of roles and responsibilities.

Summary Recommendations

This report and the following recommendations will be shared with stakeholders involved in long-term care. This includes long-term care facilities, regardless of whether they were inspected or not, respective unions, Aware NS and the NS Department of Health and Wellness all of whom play an important role in supporting safety in the sector.

Recommendations include:

- Training, education and awareness on equipment use, maintenance and management needs to be reviewed and updated to provide better direction to all users on what is required for safe use of the machines and other equipment
- Training programs and commitments need to be reviewed and updated to ensure they are up-to-date and implemented
- Facilities should continue towards adoption of an effective point of care assessment
- Current practices for hazard assessment and mitigation need to be reviewed to ensure they are effective and involve JOHS committees
- OHS programs need to ensure an effective functioning JOHS committee
- Facilities must develop and implement communication tools to provide regular updates on safety and confirm that information is received and understood