Reducing Staff Injuries: The Impact of a Safe Patient Handling Program
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Introduction

At the Portland VA Medical Center (PVAMC), the number of paid claims for manual patient handling injuries increased 13% from Fiscal Year (FY)07 through FY10, resulting in expenditures close to $500,000.

A comprehensive and innovative Safe Patient Handling (SPH) Program was implemented in 2009 to reduce injuries and associated costs.

Discussion

Insights

- Considerable reductions in staff injuries
- Significant cost savings

Easily accessible SPH equipment, a dedicated Program Coordinator and the Unit Peer Leader role are pivotal in cultivating and sustaining a minimal lift culture.

Challenges

- Cultivating culture change
- Securing time for Unit Peer Leaders to fulfill their role
- Sling distribution from central storage to individual units/areas
- Acquiring money for equipment purchases

Looking Ahead

- Expand training to disciplines beyond nursing → medical staff, compensation and pension
- Expand role of Unit Peer Leader → get involved with hospital-wide planning and decision-making
- Apply practices to emergency response, i.e., evacuation

Equipment

- Ceiling lift coverage in 10% of patient care areas
- Equipment selected and purchased
- Ceiling lifts incorporated into all new construction and remodels
- Funds released for basic equipment purchase
- Sling system initiated
- Integration of supply distribution and cleaning systems
- Equipment competencies developed

Leadership

- Part-time Program Coordinator
  - National Directive released in June 2010
- Part-time Program Educator in addition to part-time Program Coordinator
- Interdisciplinary Subcommittee meeting monthly
- Injury response established
- Participates in National Program annual conference and monthly conference calls
- Part-time Program Educator becomes full-time Program Coordinator

Education & Training

- Safe Patient Handling Program presented during nursing orientation week
- 52 Unit-level Peer Leaders selected and trained at 1st Annual PVAMC SPH Unit Peer Leader Retreat
- Equipment competencies developed
- Program Educator and Unit Peer Leaders provide staff education & training
- Ongoing equipment training
- Quarterly Unit Peer Leader Meetings
- Unit Peer Leader of the Month Program initiated
- Two Unit Peer Leaders attend first National Peer Leader Conference
- 2nd Annual PVAMC SPH Unit Peer Leader Retreat held

Results

Rate of Injuries

- The rate of staff injuries due to manual patient handling decreased 67% from FY09 to FY12

Costs of Injuries

- From FY09 to FY11, total medical and compensation costs decreased 64% (from $144,859 to $51,387)

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