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**Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Provides Recommendations to Prevent Pain and Injury in Nurses and Other Healthcare Workers**

*Back pain from work-related injuries is more frequent in healthcare than in any other occupational sector. The new policy statement calls for action by the National Institute For Occupational Safety And Health and OSHA to prevent work-related injury and illness.*

**Washington, D.C.—June 13, 2023**—The Human Factors and Ergonomics Society ([HFES](#)) has issued a new Policy Statement, [Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders in Healthcare Workers](#): Safe Patient Handling and Mobility Programs. The statement provides recommendations to reduce work-related injuries, such as back and shoulder injuries, to maintain a healthy and effective healthcare workforce.

“Survey research consistently shows that the prevalence of musculoskeletal discomfort and pain exceeds **50%** in healthcare workers who interact with patients, including nurses, nursing assistants, imaging technologists, surgeons and others,” said Carolyn Sommerich, Ph.D., CPE, FHFES, President of HFES. “The healthcare sector has the highest occurrence of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) of any industry sector, with overexertion in lifting being a primary exposure. This is primarily due to manual patient handling, which involves lifting, moving, and repositioning patients.”

Central to the HFES recommendations are safe patient handling and mobility (SPHM) programs, which have been shown to reduce healthcare worker injuries by **56%**. These programs provide a systematic, organizational approach to reducing the risks of MSDs to healthcare workers by leveraging training and SPHM equipment to promote a culture of safety and reduce the physical stresses on caregivers.

“The healthcare sector has already been strained following the COVID-19 pandemic, with increased labor shortages, longer shift work and burnout. HFES is providing recommendations and calling for fast, practical change because when **55%** of the nursing workforce is reporting back injuries, the entire healthcare system is at risk,” Dr. Sommerich said.

Only 12 states have legislation addressing injuries related to patient handling. According to research, this legislation appears to increase SPHM adoption. As this is a nationwide issue, HFES is calling for action by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), which is the federal agency responsible for the prevention of work-related injury and illness, and OSHA.

The following actions will help to prevent pain and injury in healthcare workers and preserve the availability of the U.S. healthcare workforce.

- 1) Direct OSHA to:
  - a) Develop and implement a national standard for SPHM that requires all healthcare facilities responsible for moving and assisting patients/residents to implement an SPHM program prioritizing the use of equipment that reduces the burden on those providing care.

- b) Develop and implement grant programs that provide incentives for the purchase of SPHM equipment in (i) healthcare facilities and (ii) schools and colleges that train healthcare workers.
- c) Develop programs that allow facilities with well-developed SPHM programs to share resources and best practices with other organizations to expedite the broad implementation of SPHM.
- d) Promote SPHM education and training as part of the curriculum at nursing, rehabilitation and allied health colleges and universities, including selection and use of the appropriate patient handling equipment and devices.
- e) Promote the accurate measurement of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) by adding a corresponding category to the current list of injury and illness types on the OSHA 300 form, which is used for reporting work-related injuries.
- f) Update and expand resources for healthcare facilities that provide the latest best practices for SPHM.
- g) Develop training for OSHA investigators to be used by the OSHA Training Institute that allows inspectors to identify opportunities and recommend best practices related to patient handling.

2) Increase funding for NIOSH to:

- a) Expand research efforts on the etiology of MSDs in healthcare workers,
- b) Research methods to improve the accuracy of injury reporting for MSDs,
- c) Research the most effective training methods for SPHM in both nursing schools and healthcare facilities,
- d) Research the effectiveness of new and emerging SPHM technologies,
- e) Support NIOSH education research centers (ERCs) to ensure a pipeline of investigators skilled at performing research to reduce MSDs in healthcare workers.

For more details and additional information on the recommendations to prevent MSDs among nurses and other healthcare workers, please see the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society [Policy Statement on Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders in Healthcare Workers: Safe Patient Handling and Mobility Programs](#).

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### **About Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES)**

Founded in 1957, HFES is the world's largest scientific association for human factors/ergonomics professionals. HFES serves the needs of members and the public by promoting and advancing the discovery and exchange of knowledge concerning the characteristics of human beings that are applicable to the design of systems, products, tools, and environments of all kinds. The society's more than 3,000 members work in educational institutions, companies, government and military research centers, and independent consultancies in 58 countries. About 15 percent of members are students. For more information, please visit <https://www.hfes.org/>.