

Blake 6 explores barriers to using ceiling-lifts

resolution brings increased utilization

—by Terry Snyder, senior ergonomics consultant

Recently, Tony DiGiovine, RN, nursing director for the Blake 6 Transplant Unit, reached out to the Partners Occupational Health Ergonomics Program for assistance in determining why staff were reluctant to use overhead ceiling lifts to transfer patients, and whether there was anything they could do to increase utilization. To gain an understanding of the issues, a confidential, on-line survey was administered. The survey revealed 65% of respondents reported some level of musculoskeletal discomfort, which they attributed to manual patient-handling. So why not use the lifts? Reasons cited for not using ceiling lifts included issues such as inconvenience, time constraints, inexperience using the device, and fear that patients wouldn't like it.

Staff indicated they'd be willing to try the lifts if these obstacles could be overcome. So DiGiovine and his staff implemented several strategies in preparation for a six-month trial period. They stocked more lift slings on the unit; slings were proactively placed under patients who couldn't move by themselves; staff under-

went re-training on ceiling-lift utilization; experienced lift users acted as coaches to newer users; and unit leadership encouraged the use of ceiling lifts whenever appropriate.

A post-trial-period survey revealed a marked decrease in the number of staff reporting discomfort; marked improvement in perceived convenience and time issues; and staff reported significant benefits for themselves and their patients. Some comments included: "I'm not as worn out after working with a total-care patient"; "There's less back strain, and it's easier to transport immobile patients"; and "Patients feel more secure when they're moved by lifts."

Says DiGiovine, "Having nurses and patient care associates champion this effort at the unit level was invaluable. They really helped motivate their peers."

Other keys to success included:

- staff being able to give opinions confidentially
- survey findings being shared with staff
- concerns being acknowledged and addressed
- leadership's expectations regarding ceiling-lift use being clearly communicated

Nursing assistants and registered nurses rank in the top five occupations considered at greatest risk for musculoskeletal disorders, and manual handling of patients is widely recognized as the primary cause of musculoskeletal injuries among healthcare providers.

This safe patient-handling intervention was presented at a Combined Leadership meeting in September. For a copy of the presentation or to implement a similar intervention on your unit, contact Terry Snyder at: TBSnyder@Partners.org.



Patient, Stacy Cohen, in sling and harness, volunteers to demonstrate ceiling lifts along with Blake 6 staff members (l-r): Betty Henderson, PCA; Cynthia Velazquez, RN; Deb Whitaker, RN; Sara Duane, RN; and Deb Murphy, RN.