

Help Protect Millions of Nurses and Patients -- Support Safe Patient Handling Legislation – Cosponsor H.R. 2381

Dear Representative:

On behalf of patients and health care workers from across the country, we strongly urge you to cosponsor H.R. 2381, introduced by Congressman John Conyers. This important legislation would require OSHA to develop and implement a standard that will eliminate, to the greatest degree feasible based on technological and medical considerations, manual lifting of patients by direct-care registered nurses and other health care workers through the use of mechanical devices.

Thousands of nurses and other health care providers are being injured every year because they are forced to manually lift patients. Direct-care registered nurses rank tenth among all occupations for getting musculoskeletal disorders, getting injured at a higher rate than laborers, movers, and truck drivers. In 2007, Direct-care registered nurses ranked seventh among all occupations for the number of cases of musculoskeletal disorders resulting in days away from work - 8,580 total cases. Nursing aides, orderlies and attendants sustained 24,340 musculoskeletal disorders in 2007, the second highest of any occupation. The leading cause of these injuries in health care are the result of patient lifting, transferring, and repositioning injuries. The physical demands of the nursing profession lead many nurses to leave the profession. 52 percent of nurses complain of chronic back pain and 38 percent suffer from pain severe enough to require leave from work. Many nurses suffering back injury do not return to work.

Patients are not at optimum levels of safety while being lifted, transferred, or repositioned manually. Mechanical lift programs can reduce skin tears suffered by patients by threefold, allowing patients a safer means to progress through their care. The development of assistive patient handling equipment and devices has essentially rendered the act of strict manual patient handling unnecessary as a function of nursing care. Application of assistive patient handling technology fulfills an ergonomic approach within the nursing practice by designing and fitting the job or workplace to match the capabilities and limitations of the human body. A growing number of health care facilities have incorporated patient handling technology and have reported positive results. Injuries among nursing staff have dramatically declined since implementing patient handling equipment and devices. As a result, the number of lost work days secondary to injury and staff turnover has declined. Cost-benefit analyses have also shown that assistive patient handling technology successfully reduces workers' compensation costs for musculoskeletal disorders.

To address this critical problem, Congressman John Conyers, along with Representative Lynn Woolsey as an original cosponsor, has introduced the **“Nurse and Health Care Worker Protection Act of 2009” (H.R. 2381)**. This legislation would require OSHA to develop and implement a standard that will eliminate, to the greatest degree feasible based on technological and medical considerations, manual lifting of patients by direct-care registered nurses and other

health care workers through the use of mechanical devices. The legislation will also require health care facilities to develop a plan to comply with the standard (with input from healthcare workers), provides protection for health care workers through refusal of assignment and whistleblower provisions, and requires the Secretary to perform audits.

Once again, we strongly urge you to cosponsor H.R. 2381, which will protect millions of patient and health care workers. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

American Federation of Government Employees

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

California Nurses Association/NNOC

Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO

International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace & Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)

RNs Working Together, AFL-CIO

Service Employees International Union, CTW

United American Nurses, AFL-CIO

United Food and Commercial Workers Union

United Steelworkers