Q&A: Handle With Care

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Surgical Products *spoke with Michael Maske, VP of Sales, TransMotion Medical, Inc., about safe patient transfer and handling prior to surgery and the products that allow staff and personnel to do their jobs efficiently and effectively during the preop process.*

SP: When it comes to patient handling prior to surgery, what are some critical considerations that health care professionals must keep in mind to ensure the patient's comfort and safety?

Maske: Key considerations for health care personnel are flexibility of patient surface prior to the procedure. Patients that need to be positioned in a seated or supine position must be able to accommodate both. Finding a device, such as a Stretcher-Chair, that can function as a wheel-chair, a transport device (typically a stretcher), and also as a recliner, will add efficiency, safety, and comfort to the patient experience. Having multiple pieces of patient handling equipment creates a situation whereby the patient must be transferred, creating a risk of staff member injury, or patient fall. These risks are eliminated with an integrated, all-in-one device. Fabric and foam must be checked for adequate pressure reduction properties, as the patient will remain on the surface throughout their surgical stay.

SP: What are some key features of transport chairs and stretchers that allow the patient to be safe and comfortable and allow the staff member to be safe, comfortable, and able to do their job effectively?

Maske: Motorized positioning is the key to a safe experience for staff and patient. Manual positioning of patients creates risk for staff member injury. The U.S. population is still increasing in weight, as an average man now weighs 195 pounds,

according to the Centers for Disease Control.

SP: How can the technology that's available today help medical personnel save time and/or become more efficient when it comes to patient handling prior to surgery?

Maske: According to a time/motion study conducted by Ann Hendrich in 2005, it was estimated to take three minutes of time to transfer a patient. Operating room time is valued at $100/minute. This can be a significant cost to incur. Elimination of the patient transfer 'leans' out the patient handling process. Not only is efficiency increased in "no-lift/no-transfer" ORs, reduction of injury hazards is also a key component.

In a typical OR, a minimum of two transfers is typically incurred. University of Miami's Bascom Palmer Eye Institute previously performed three transfers per surgery. By converting to a surgical stretcher-chair, they eliminated all transfers. This resulted in 30,000 transfers being eliminated on an annual basis. Ann Hendrich's time/motion study estimated the cost of transfer at $12-36 for each transfer. This was a yearly savings to the facility of nearly $1 million.

SP: Do you feel most medical facilities/hospitals are up to par when it comes to patient handling prior to surgery? Why or why not?

Maske: According to the American Nurses Association, 12 percent of nurses leave the profession and cite back injury as a main reason for departing. Twenty percent of nurses transfer out of direct care to avoid high-risk nursing units. Nursing ranks as one of the highest risk professions for musculoskeletal injury. These statistics remain high, even with aggressive safe patient handling programs in place. Any type of patient handling involves risk to staff members for injury. All instances of patient handling involve significant risks, and correcting the problem will take legislation and additional focus on the obesity problem that the U.S. faces. In addition, nursing shortages are being exacerbated, and stand to worsen with the movement of the Baby Boom population into retirement.

SP: In what ways to they need to improve?

Maske: Utilizing the principles of Lean and Six Sigma to identify obvious waste is a key first step. The patient transfer is a key area that if addressed, can have far reaching effects for both patient experience and reducing nurse injuries. There are multiple technologies that collectively deployed, can have a significant impact on reducing injuries in healthcare.

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