

Nurses Prone To Injuries With Heavier Patients

Sydney Lupkin

Loretta Pierce is only 46, but she has already retired from [nursing](#) [1] in favor of a desk job.

After years of lifting heavy patients and equipment that resulted in a herniated disc, she said she knew her body just couldn't handle the work anymore.

"I'm almost fearful as a nurse of going back to taking care of patients unless I have proper equipment," said Pierce, who worked in organ recovery, the intensive care unit and the emergency room. "It's kind of sad when you have to end your nursing career because you can't physically do the job anymore because your body's so beat up."

Nursing aides, orderlies and attendants suffer more musculoskeletal injuries than people in any other profession – including firefighters, according to the latest data from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) [2]. Registered nurses also endure more of these injuries than the average worker.

Even worse, patients are getting heavier -- [especially in the Midwest](#) [3] where Pierce spent her career, she said. She recalled taking a patient to a dock to weigh him because no scale was available in the hospital that could do the job.

Still, she'd never think of saying "no" to helping a fellow nurse move a patient, no matter the toll on her body.

"It's kind of ingrained in you when a colleague asks for help, you go and you help. You don't even think twice because they're in trouble," said Pierce, who works in Nebraska. "We're a team. You don't leave a man down."

The American Nurses Association has been pressing for years to pass a federal law mandating nationwide standards to protect nurses from injuries, but an effort undertaken a few years ago was thwarted, they said.

In a [report](#) [4] titled "Health Care Workers Unprotected," watchdog organization Public Citizen said the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, or OSHA, needs to develop standards for nurses and perform more inspections to ensure their safety.

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