"Save the Back:" The "SIMPLE” Program
Patricia D. Baker, RN-BC, BSN
South Texas Veterans Health Care System
Lynn Salazar, Carolyn Patterson, Marthe Moseley, Christine Williams

**Problem:** Of the top ten occupations, health caregivers involved in direct care of totally or highly physically dysfunctional patients are at high risk for injury to the musculoskeletal system and patient. A nurse will lift approximately 1,700 pounds in an 8 hour shift. Traditionally, healthcare facilities have provided proven ineffective employee training on manual lifting techniques, back belt usage, and body mechanics when handling patients. Evidence-based practice focuses on patient handling equipment, proper lifting ergonomics, no lift policies, and lift teams.

**Evidence:** In 2003, ANA implemented the Handle with Care® Campaign. In 2005, VHA provided data suggesting 35% of all back injuries resulted from patient transfers with associated cost of over $25 million annually; developed “Patient Care Ergonomics Program;” and, Texas, the first state in the nation, signed into law Senate Bill 1525.

**Strategy:** The VHA’s program includes technological solutions for safe patient handling and movement; patient assessment, care planning, algorithms, information on developing a no-lift policy and lift teams; back injury resource nurses; an after action review process, competency program to prevent musculoskeletal injuries in caregivers, evaluating outcomes, and special handling and movement challenges related to bariatrics.

**Practice Change:** The VHA’s program is included in OSHA’s ergonomic guidelines, the ANA’s “handle with care” ergonomic campaign, and several VHA facilities. In 2008, VHA approved purchase of “EZ Out Vehicle Extraction Lift” device for the Emergency Department and four Out-patient Clinics.

**Evaluation:** VISN 8 piloted this program in 23 units at high-risk for injuries from patient handling tasks.

**Results:** Reduction in injury rates, average number of modified duty days per injury, lost workdays, and improved job satisfaction and patient handling practices.

**Recommendations:** Determine the most beneficial locations and potential cost or benefit; and seek help from safety managers in reviewing data, selecting equipment types, and planning program implementation.

**Lesson Learned:** Right mechanical lift device for the right patient in the right environment equals quality outcomes.

**Bibliography:**