Ergonomics in HealthCare: A Continuing Education Program for Nursing Staff

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The Center for the Promotion of Health in the New England Workplace (CPH-NEW) is a Total Worker Health Center of Excellence funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH, 2006-2021). One of the center’s dissemination and implementation projects is to develop a continuing education program for nursing staff related to ergonomics and safe patient handling in healthcare. To develop an evidence-based program, we distributed an online Ergonomic Needs Assessment survey in May to June 2016 and collected a total of 178 responses from nurses in the community. The survey results suggested that musculoskeletal injury prevention in healthcare, best practices for musculoskeletal injury prevention, and best practices for safe patient handling programs are the top three areas of interests from nurses. Both patient handling and non-patient handling tasks (such as pushing/pulling carts or equipment, poor computer workstation, and clustered workspace) are perceived to put nurses at severe injury risk. In addition, we invited a panel of 11 experts in the field to review the online program at the inception phase and after the initial development to examine for content validity and visual impact.

Based on the survey results, feedback from our expert panel, and a comprehensive search and review of the available resources, we developed the “Ergonomics in Healthcare: A Continuing Education Program for Nursing Staff” which is designed to help healthcare facilities and nursing staff to learn how to reduce the risk of work-related musculoskeletal disorders. The program will inform healthcare facilities and nursing staff about effective strategies to eliminate or reduce hazards associated with patient handling and non-patient handling tasks, using ergonomic principles, work practice, and administrative controls. The program includes five modules covering topic areas including:

Module 1: Musculoskeletal Injuries in Nursing: Am I at Risk?
Module 2: Identify Ergonomic Risk Factors in Your Work Environment
Module 3: Apply Ergonomic Principles in Patient Handling and Non-Patient Handling Tasks
Module 4: Define the Essential Elements of a Multicomponent Safe Patient Handling Program

Module 5: Make the Case for an Effective Safe Patient Handling Program in Your Facility

Nursing staff will learn the latest evidence on ergonomics and safe patient handling in healthcare and where to find research articles and professional websites with related resources. They will discuss ways to build a business case for investing in patient handling and other ergonomic equipment and programs. They will understand how to access and disseminate this free online program with staff in their organizations to acquire contact hours for continuing education. We are anticipating the program launching in fall 2017.

Learning Objectives

- To describe the process of program development using key stakeholders for a continuing education program on ergonomics and safe patient handling for nursing staff
- To describe three areas of concern reported by nurses related to ergonomics and safe patient handling in healthcare
- To describe scope and objectives of the continuing education program
- To identify five topic areas covered in the continuing education program