

# Health and community services industry Sprains and strains prevention fact sheet



## High risk health and community services industry occupations<sup>1</sup>

- registered nurse
- police officer
- personal care assistant
- nursing assistant
- teacher
- labourer
- enrolled nurse
- cleaner

## Common manual task injuries

- sprains and strains to the back, knees, shoulder and necks
- spinal disorders
- overuse injuries
- hernias

## Common cause of manual task injury

- lifting and carrying loads (e.g. incorrectly handling when lifting patients or objects)
- sustaining awkward postures for long periods (e.g. supporting body parts for wound dressing)
- incorrect use of equipment for handling patients or objects
- repeated movements (e.g. bending and squatting to dress and shower patients, or bed making)
- slips, trips and falls from contaminants on floors (e.g. bathroom or dining room)
- dressing residents and dressing patient wounds

<sup>1</sup> Queensland Workplace Health and Safety Strategy Health and Community Services Industry Action Plan 2004–07

# Health and community services industry

## Sprains and strains prevention fact sheet



### Patient handling – a case study

A personal carer suffers a back sprain while showering an aged resident. His back locks up and he requires assistance from another worker. The injured worker states he has been experiencing different levels of lower back pain for a long period, but it went away after he rested. The worker has six weeks of rest and extensive physiotherapy before returning to work.

#### Identify the problem

An analysis of carers normal tasks shows:

- carers bend, reach and stretch to shower and toilet residents
- carers bend and reach when making beds
- beds are placed so that carers couldn't access all sides easily
- carers kneel or squat when dressing residents
- carers perform tasks repeatedly during the day
- residents are showered and dressed over a one hour period each day.

#### Assess the risk

Are any risk factors present?

- **Working postures:** workers are reaching away from the body, bending and twisting to assist residents to shower, and are bending and squatting repeatedly
- **Forceful exertions:** carers are assisting residents during a fall and supporting body parts to dress wounds
- **Duration:** work is performed for more than two hours.

What are causing these risk factors?

- **Work area design:** showers and chairs do not allow carers to assume comfortable postures
- **Nature of the load:** residents can be wet, slippery and have delicate skin
- **Load handling:** most residents are relatively mobile in low care facilities, but require some support.

#### Find the solutions

Can you eliminate the risk by redesigning the task or elements of the task?

- Change the work area by moving beds away from walls and allowing sufficient room in the bathroom for two people
- Use stools to support body parts when dressing
- Use long-handled brushes to minimise bending in the shower
- Use mechanical aids and walk belts when required.

Can administrative controls be used to minimise risk?

- Task rotation
- Rest breaks
- Training.

#### Review the controls

- Consult with workers regularly to ensure controls have minimised risk and have not introduced new risks.