

## To Our Clients and Friends:

In this issue we feature a subject of major importance in home care and in health care generally: the high risk of musculoskeletal injury as the result of manual patient lifting. We describe the scope of the problem, the recommendations for addressing it and some of the approaches we take at Ready Hands. We hope you find the information of interest.

In 2013 we experienced our 11th consecutive year of growth, for which we continue to thank the many clients and senior-serving professionals who have placed their confidence in us. This year (2014) promises comparable success, but also a number of new challenges about which we will have more to say later.

Warmest regards to everyone!

*The Ready Hands Home Care Team*

## Musculoskeletal Injuries to Direct Care Workers: Rampant but Preventable by Safe Patient Handling Programs

At our annual workers compensation insurance audit, the auditor made an interesting comment: she remarked that our worker injury rate was far lower than other home care companies. Her observation made us feel validated in our conscious efforts to minimize such injuries—efforts that are not always easy.

Many of our clients have impaired mobility due to stroke, Parkinson's disease, ALS, advanced dementia and other causes. Our Home Care Aides are called upon to lift and transfer such clients from their beds, chairs, toilets or bath tubs. Even for a trained, able-bodied aide, the physical demands can pose serious risks of musculoskeletal injury. Clients are also at risk from being dropped, sustaining skin tears, and experiencing shear injury leading to pressure sores. The growing obesity epidemic in the United States has only aggravated these risks.

Families often approach us with the request that we provide a strong aide. "Dad is a big man and even my sister and I together have difficulty getting him out of bed", a daughter might say. "We want a strong male aide to care for him." This is a natural instinct, but assigning the most physically powerful aide is never a good solution. Consider these facts:

- ◆ Rates of back and other musculoskeletal injuries due to overexertion in health care are among the highest of all industries.
- ◆ These injuries can result in life-altering, career-ending disabling conditions.
- ◆ The Virginia Department of Labor and Industry lists "Nursing Aides, Orderlies and Attendants" as the fourth most hazard-



*Mechanical lifts of various designs are invaluable for permitting the safe transfer of disabled patients*

ous occupation. The only occupations cited as more dangerous are truck drivers, construction and non-construction laborers.

- ◆ The single greatest risk factor for overexertion injuries in health care is the manual lifting, moving or repositioning of patients.
- ◆ Home Care Aides are at higher risk than others because in a home setting there is usually no one to help and they may feel pressured to go beyond what is safe.

The problem is serious enough that researchers at the University of Virginia have labeled this a "crisis in healthcare" and are among the many who have called for a "safe patient handling – no manual lift" policy to be enacted nationwide. Numerous states have passed legislation or created regulations to

# News for Clients and Friends

## Worker injury, continued

protect workers from lifting injuries. In 2013, The Nurse and Healthcare Worker Protection Act was introduced in the U.S. Congress. Regrettably it has not seen passage, leaving our country behind others like England and Australia which have had “No Lifting” policies in effect since the 1990’s.

Safe Patient Handling (SPH) programs have been proven to markedly reduce lifting injury. Key components include the active involvement of direct care nurses in evaluating lifting safety, visible administrative support and “no manual lift” policies. Most importantly, however, such programs always call for wider use of mechanical aides such as gait belts, sliding transfer boards and mechanical lifts. Relying on body mechanics is *not* a solution. Thirty-five years of research has shown no evidence that body mechanics alone will protect workers when manually lifting patients.

At Ready Hands, our full-time Registered Nurse Supervisors try to appraise objectively each care recipient’s lifting needs and introduce methods for keeping all parties safe. One result is that the use of gait belts and lifts is relatively common in our company. Sometimes a “lift team” approach, which incurs more costs for the client, has been the only alternative to the client remaining in bed. Admittedly we have not always succeeded in achieving the best evidence-based solutions, especially when costs or client resistance have been factors. However, we will continue to approach this issue with the seriousness which it deserves.

## Four Exceptional Aides Receive Quarterly Recognition Awards



Ankrah

With over 140 active Home Care Aides, it is not easy to single out just a few for special recognition. However we have no reservations in the case of these four great aides.

**Hannah Ankrah** joined us in March, 2010 and has been a blessing ever since. Her calm, warm demeanor and dedicated service have impressed every one of her clients.



Mansaray

With over seven years of service, **Sofiya Mergia** (not pictured) has been a model of reliability, good judgment and caring manner. She epitomizes everything we look for in a Home Care Aide.

**Alpha Mansaray** has principally worked with one client since being hired in May of 2012. That client and family have consistently communicated their great appreciation for Alpha. He has been a great asset.



Sherry

Employed only since June, 2013, **Halimatu Sherry** is the newest of the four recipients but in that short time “Hali’s” hard work, commitment and warm heart have endeared her to us and her extremely appreciative client. Thanks for a great job!

## Facts About Health Worker Injury

- ◆ Nursing aides, orderlies and attendants have a rate of work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSD) **more than seven times the national average** for all occupations.
- ◆ Back injuries due to manual patient handling remain the **#1 injury reported in health care**.
- ◆ Healthcare worker back injuries alone, excluding other MSD, are **estimated to cost \$20 billion annually** in direct and indirect costs.
- ◆ According to the Joint Commission, the **top reason nurses leave the profession**, aside from retirement, is to seek a less physically demanding job.
- ◆ Lifting and transferring activities cause injury due to **performing repetitive movements and being forced into awkward body postures**, not just by having to exert excessive force.
- ◆ The average cumulative weight a nurse may have to lift in an eight-hour shift is **1.8 tons**. That’s **nine tons per week**.
- ◆ **Safe Patient Handling programs reduce** workers’ compensation claims by 30-95%, lost workday injury rates by 66-100% and restricted workdays by as much as 38%.
- ◆ The **safe limit** for manually lifting a patient is estimated to be **35 pounds—assuming a cooperative patient**.

## How to Attract and Retain Good Employees: Treat Them Well!

Recently a large area home care company announced a job fair at which they would be hiring and screening 75 new home care workers on the spot. This got us to asking why we have never felt the need for such measures. The following partial list of answers might be useful strategies for that company to consider:

- ◆ We treat all employees and employment applicants with courtesy, friendliness and respect. We make sure they know how much we appreciate them.
- ◆ All Home Care Aides who meet basic performance expectations receive a five percent bonus every quarter.
- ◆ We give a generous cash gift to all aides every December in advance of the holiday season.
- ◆ We send out Certificates of Appreciation or Thank You cards when we hear compliments from clients or when an employee does something exceptional.
- ◆ The first question we ask of every new hire is “What schedule and location would best meet **your** needs?”
- ◆ We make it easy for aides to apply for work and we make them feel welcome. They can call, walk in, mail/email/fax an application without restrictions.

Happy aides tell their friends. At Ready Hands we are fortunate to have a steady “pipeline” of aides seeking work at our company. No job fairs needed so far!