

WCB NEWS RELEASE

WCB FUNDS VANCOUVER ISLAND HEALTH AUTHORITY TO PREVENT INJURIES TO HEALTHCARE WORKERS

Victoria, BC July 23, 2003 – Today the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) and the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) announced a \$1.1 million two-year project that will result in fewer healthcare workers being injured while lifting and transferring patients. The funding will be used to purchase new ceiling lifts, implement new policies and procedures for their use, and provide training for more than 300 workers.

VIHA Occupational Health and Safety Services based the decision on which facilities will receive equipment and training on an extensive risk analysis and an audit of all facilities on the Island.

Implementation of this program will include joint union / management participation to ensure all impacted parties have a voice and the opportunity to participate in the decisions, continuing VIHA's practice of ensuring workers have influence on their collective future.

Betty Pirs, Director of Industry Services for the WCB, congratulated the Comox Valley Community Health Council for its successful pilot program, funded by the WCB in 1998 at St. Joseph's General Hospital, Comox where 65 ceiling lifts were installed. She commented, "The Council had the foresight to understand the human and financial benefits of putting ceiling lifts in their facilities. As a result, there are fewer injured workers, saving thousands of dollars in claims costs, and patients are moved easily and more comfortably."

The Occupational Health and Safety Agency for Healthcare (OHSAH) in BC evaluated the pilot program and found:

- a 58% reduction in musculoskeletal injury (MSI) rates associated with lifting and transferring (Ronald et al. 2002);
- a 69% reduction in claims costs for lift and transfer injuries, and;
- a 58% reduction in the incidence of lift and transfer claims (Spiegel et al. 2002).

“Improving workplace safety is one our top priorities said,” said Rick Roger, CEO of the Vancouver Island Health Authority. “We’re very pleased that WCB is providing the financial assistance we need to continue upgrading equipment and training staff in our facilities on safe and appropriate patient transfer techniques.”

Health care workers experience a higher percentage of back strain claims than other workers in BC. For the years 1998 – 2002, BC’s health care workers sustained 40,000 injuries at a cost of \$296 million to health care employers. The WCB, in partnership with health care employers and workers, is committed to reducing the number and severity of those injuries.

Serving nearly two million workers and more than 170,000 employers, the Workers' Compensation Board of BC is a provincial statutory agency governed by a Board of Directors. The WCB is committed to a safe and healthy workplace, to providing return-to-work rehabilitation and legislated compensation benefits to workers injured as a result of their employment, and to being responsible, accountable and financially sustainable.

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