

A Room Where Nurses Learn How Not to Get Hurt



Shoshana Herndon/MU

A nursing student at the University of Missouri practices using a lift that helps transfer patients from one chair to another

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This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

Nurses spend their lives helping other people recover from injuries and illnesses. Yet nurses suffer a surprising number of injuries and illnesses themselves because of their work. In fact, the United States Department of Labor says nursing is the second leading profession for on-the-job injuries. It ranks higher than construction work and law enforcement. Only freight and stock movers report higher injury rates.

Nurses and other health care workers do a lot of heavy lifting on the job. Lifting and moving patients improperly leads to sprains, strains and muscle tears -- leading causes of injuries to nurses.

Gretchen Gregory is an instructor at the Sinclair School of Nursing on the Columbia campus of the University of Missouri. She says back problems are the greatest threat that nurses face when they lift or move patients.

GRETCHEN GREGORY: "You're talking about people that have handicaps or limited mobility, that need much assistance. And we have untrained people to do that assisting and that puts them at risk for hurting their backs."

Ms. Gregory leads a new training room where nurses can learn to keep themselves and their patients safe. She says most nurses lack training in how to lift patients.

GRETCHEN GREGORY: "That's not something that we teach in school, but that's when falls happen and that's when nurses get hurt."

She says the safe practices room has special equipment, including a life-size mannequin doll. This "patient" can be made to weigh as much as one hundred fifty-nine kilograms.

GRETCHEN GREGORY: "We have a mannequin that we can fill up with water and he becomes a three-hundred-and-fifty-pound mannequin that they have to learn to use this transfer equipment to get patients in and out of bed or from another bed to a stretcher."

Ms. Gregory says most American hospitals have lifting equipment to help nurses move patients. But she says the equipment is often pushed back in a corner somewhere -- unused and forgotten. She says the safe practices room teaches the importance of using the tools and skills available.

GRETCHEN GREGORY: "Teaching students to take the extra time to use those and learning how to use them well and efficiently is going to be a key to helping prevent back injuries."

The training room also seeks to improve communication skills and other practices in a setting designed to copy a busy hospital or clinic.

GRETCHEN GREGORY: "If we provide an environment where everything's nice and quiet and they can give their medications or they can communicate to a physician when there's nothing going on, that's not really a real-life setting. They have to be able to do it with some distraction."

An unidentified donor gave three hundred thousand dollars to build the new room. The University of Missouri describes it as one of the first of its kind at a nursing school in the United States. Pictures are at voaspecialenglish.com.

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report, written by June Simms. I'm Steve Ember.