

Guidance on Safety with Mobile Patient Hoists and Slings in Healthcare Establishments

Information Sheet

March 2011

Patient hoists and slings are used in many healthcare establishments to assist in the moving and handling of patients and reduce the degree of manual handling required by the carer. This information sheet provides guidance for employers and employees in healthcare establishments on safety with mobile hoists and slings.

Patient hoists and slings provided for use by employees at the workplace are workplace equipment and must comply with the relevant provisions of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 with respect to safety and health. They are classed as medical devices under the EC (Medical Devices) Regulations. They must be properly selected, used and maintained to ensure the safety of both the employees and the patient concerned.

This guide focuses on stand alone mobile patient hoists and slings in healthcare establishments but the principles can be applied to other types of patient hoists such as overhead tracking hoists and fixed position hoists.

Selection

Employers should determine if patient hoists are required at the workplace to assist with patient handling and if so, decide on the number of hoists and slings to be provided. Consultation with relevant personnel including those who work with the patients, those who will be using the equipment and those maintaining it should be included. Selection of equipment to address individual patient needs is not addressed here and is a matter for the relevant clinicians.

The following should be considered when purchasing hoists and slings;

- Is the equipment CE marked and accompanied by an appropriate EC Declaration of Conformity?
- Is there a user manual with the equipment?
- Is the safe working load marked on hoists and slings and are the weights of the proposed user group within the safe working load of the hoists and slings?
- Does the equipment suit the work environment for which it is intended and is it compatible with other aids? E.g. are the slings in use compatible with the patient hoist, do the wheels move correctly on the surface where the hoist will be used, is there room to manoeuvre, does the hoist fit under the patient bath, bed, trolley etc. How wide is the base of the hoist or is it adjustable to a suitable width?
- Have the cleaning, decontamination and infection control requirements been considered? Are the slings reusable or disposable and has

the service life recommended by the manufacturer been taken account of?

- What maintenance will be required and how will it be provided? Consider the service life of the hoist and the arrangements for replacement.
- What are the storage requirements? Can the equipment be stored safely and is there enough space for it, can it be stored in close proximity to where it is used? Devices should be located so that they are accessible to workers.
- How is the unit charged? Is there an indicator of the remaining battery charge, what is the charging time of the battery, what is the amount of space required for charging and what electrical receptacles are required?

This is not an exhaustive list.

Maintenance

An employer must ensure that patient hoists and slings are maintained in good condition and do not pose a risk to those using the work equipment or to others who may be affected by the condition of the equipment, particularly the patients concerned.

Manufacturer's instructions/information, including those relating to installation, safe use, maintenance and service life of equipment must be followed.

Employees should carry out a visual inspection of the hoist and sling prior to use and report any defects noted. Where a hoist or sling or related system of work is found to be defective this must be reported and the employer must take the necessary corrective action, including taking unsafe equipment out of use and labelling it as unsafe.

Patient hoists and slings must be thoroughly examined by a competent person at least once in every six month period.

A register must be kept of lifting equipment and lifting accessories containing the details of the equipment, distinguishing number or mark, date of first use and date of last thorough examination and testing. The register must be kept available for inspection by an inspector.

A competent person carrying out a thorough examination must prepare a report of the examination containing the particulars set out in Schedule 1 Part E of the Safety Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007. Where alterations or repairs have been carried out relevant to the safe operation of the equipment, the equipment must be examined by a competent person prior to its return to service. The report produced or a copy of it must be kept at the place of work.

Where repairs are required the owner and the user must be informed in writing of the need for the repairs and, as appropriate, the time period within which the repairs should be carried out. It should be ensured that the relevant information is conveyed to all appropriate persons within the workplace such as the line manager in charge of the hoist and employees using the hoist.

A competent person may recommend a more frequent examination of the hoist and/or sling and will give their reason for this in writing to the owner and user of the equipment.

Where immediate cessation of the use of the hoist and/or sling has been advised the competent person must notify the Health and Safety Authority not later than 20 days after the completion of the examination.

Where the safety of equipment depends on the installation conditions the equipment must be inspected after installation and before it is put into service and inspected after assembly at any new location to ensure it is safe to use and operating properly.

There should be procedures in place for equipment management. The Irish Medicine's Board has made available guidance relating to equipment management available at www.imb.ie.

Training

Staff involved in patient handling must have appropriate training in this regard, delivered by a competent person. Training should be repeated at regular intervals (as a guide the interval should be not more than every 3 years but more often if circumstances dictate). Standard patient handling training should include a demonstration of hoist and sling use.

Different types and makes of hoists and their accessories/attachments (including slings) have different features and functions and the operator must have the necessary instruction and information to use the equipment safely.

The principles of safe patient handling must be practised and staff must be given adequate supervision in this regard when carrying out patient moving and handling activities.

Records must be kept of training and instruction provided with regard to patient handling and the use of patient handling aids.

Risk Assessment

Risk assessment must be carried out of the patient moving and handling task to determine if manual handling can be avoided and if not, what controls are required to reduce the risk. Where a hoist is required the risk assessment must cover all aspects of the hoisting situation including;

- Task: e.g. bathing - what type of hoist, spreader and sling (including sling size) are needed.
- Individual Capability: e.g. the physical suitability, knowledge and skills of the handler.

- Load: Safe working load of the hoist, the suitability of the hoist and sling for the person being moved, considering their individual needs.
- Environment –e.g. turning circle required, floor surface, obstructions or space constraints.

Risk assessments must be documented and brought to the attention of relevant employees.

Reporting of Adverse Incidents and Near Misses

Any adverse incident or near miss event relating to the use of patient hoists and slings must be reported to an appointed person in charge in the establishment with a view to ensuring care of any individual concerned and preventing recurrence.

Reporting of adverse incidents to the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is mandatory with regard to certain categories of work related injuries and to work related fatalities (part X of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 1993). There is also a voluntary user reporting system to the Irish Medicines Board with regard to incidents involving medical devices.

See www.hsa.ie and www.imb.ie for further information on what is to be reported and how to report.



Further Information

The Irish Medicines Board provides information on the quality, safety and efficacy of medical devices which includes patient hoists and slings at www.imb.ie.

Further information on patient and manual handling is available at www.hsa.ie or by contacting the HSA Workplace Contact Unit at **1890 289 389**.