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**NEWS RELEASE**



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## **American Nurses Association Statement**

### **“Health Care Workers Unprotected”: Clarion Call for Culture of Safety**

**SILVER SPRING, MD** – The American Nurses Association asked nurses to share their experiences with patient handling. This devastating story from Alexis, a home health nurse from Pennsylvania, demonstrates why we absolutely need action now to protect health care workers: *“I injured my lower back lifting a patient,” she wrote. “This injury has haunted me throughout my nursing career. I was 22 when it occurred and at 33 I have the back of a 70-year-old.”*

Public Citizen’s “Health Care Workers Unprotected” report addresses a crucial issue for patients and workers. And it’s very timely. Three weeks ago, the American Nurses Association, in collaboration with a multi-disciplinary team of national experts, published interprofessional national standards for creating, implementing, and managing a [safe patient handling and mobility program](#). These standards reach beyond hospitals to encompass rehab, long-term care, home care, physical and occupational therapy – any setting where patients need help with mobility.

The purpose of this effort is to change the way health care is delivered by eliminating manual patient handling. This just got a big boost in Congress. Congressman John Conyers (D-MI) is sponsoring the [Nurse and Health Care Worker Protection Act of 2013 \(H.R. 2480\)](#) to improve health care worker and patient safety, while improving quality of care. It directs the Department of Labor to establish similar standards. The legislation incorporates key content from the new publication, [Safe Patient Handling and Mobility: Interprofessional National Standards](#).

Research shows that the use of assistive technology reduces injuries to workers and patients, and lowers costs attributable to workers’ compensation, lost productivity, and turnover. Far too many health care workers are suffering preventable neck, shoulder and back injuries from manual patient handling.

**MORE . . .**

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Health care managers and workers themselves often don’t realize that these potentially career-ending injuries don’t always occur as a single event. The cumulative effects over years of repetitive strains result in long-term, debilitating disorders that often require surgery. And, while nurses may consider moving a 90-pound person up in bed quick and easy – in what other profession is 90 pounds considered light? In what other profession would a worker lift 90 pounds without mechanical support?

Bureau of Labor Statistics show that registered nurses had the fifth most musculoskeletal injuries resulting in missed work days of any occupation. Nursing assistants ranked first. What occupations ranked in between? Laborers, janitors, and truck drivers. It’s alarming that health care workers rank alongside these physical, labor-intensive jobs in terms of injuries. This is a primary reason health care workers leave direct patient care. We can’t afford the losses of health care workers to injury and still meet rising demands for health care services.

Establishing a culture of safety for safe patient handling and mobility is a paradigm shift, much like wearing gloves and protective equipment for all blood and body fluid precautions was 20 years ago. We now have universal or standard precautions indicating all blood and body fluid is hazardous and requires protective equipment. It is time we assume all lifting is hazardous to workers and patients alike, and ensure we have protective equipment in place – and use it!

This report and associated initiatives must serve as a clarion call for a commitment to the culture of safety that all health care workers and patients deserve.

A comprehensive safe patient handling and mobility program makes sense in both human and financial terms. Our top obligation is to protect the health and safety of workers and patients. Now is the time for solutions, not excuses.

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*ANA is the only full-service professional organization representing the interests of the nation's 3.1 million registered nurses through its constituent and state nurses associations and its organizational affiliates. ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the rights of nurses in the workplace, projecting a positive and realistic view of nursing, and by lobbying the Congress and regulatory agencies on health care issues affecting nurses and the public.*