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Incorporating lift systems into therapeutic interventions: Breaking the myths of dependency

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Given occupational demands, the prevalence of Work-Related Musculo-Skeletal Disorders (WMSD) among physical therapists (PTs) has been reported as high as 63%. Despite this, many therapists have declined use of lifting technologies. In large part, this reflects their belief that such equipment minimizes active engagement of the patient during mobility tasks, thereby hampering functional improvements. Another barrier is the belief that lifting equipment should be reserved for nurses who are less trained in skillful transfers. However, when lifting equipment is appropriately utilized, the risk of injury to both the therapist and the patient can be diminished without compromising treatment effectiveness. For example, by modulating the degree of assistance provided by the lifting device, the exertion level of the patient can be controlled, safety of all participants ensured, and the PT made available for “hands-on” facilitation. Pilot data revealed lifting equipment reduced PT fatigue levels, while patient exertion levels were found to be comparable to those experienced during non-equipment assisted mobility. This data provides preliminary evidence to support use of lifting equipment within traditional physical therapy interventions. Further, minimizing PT fatigue levels may enhance treatment session productivity through earlier patient progression to surfaces, positions, and equipment that would not otherwise be safe or possible. Despite these favorable outcomes, a philosophical shift is required if incorporation of lifting technologies into mainstream practice will one day occur. To this end, an educational initiative is currently underway to integrate lifting technologies into the didactic training of PT students for implementation during evidence-based interventions.

Biography

Rick Zock, MPT, CEAS II, CSPHP: Injury Prevention Educator at Christiana Care Health System. Mr. Zock publishes and presents in safe patient handling for PT/OT and orthopedic nursing.

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