

FAIR HAVEN UNITED CHURCH HOMES

Vancouver, BC

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Nursing home lifts safety record to new heights

Nursing home care can be very tough on a caregiver's body, because residents have to be lifted and moved in and out of wheelchairs a lot. Care workers at facilities run by Fair Haven United Church Homes were having a large number of musculoskeletal injuries (MSI), so many that management decided to act even before WCB invited them to take part in the Focus Firm Strategy.

"We had recognized that our injury rates were among the worst in the province for long-term care facilities," says Beverly O'Malley, Director of Care at Fair Haven's Vancouver facility.

When WCB made the company a focus firm in 1999, they had already decided to conduct a formal MSI prevention program. "We felt that we as an organization should take responsibility because we are paying for the injuries and the costs were spiraling out of control," says O'Malley.

Fair Haven operates two nursing homes providing intermediate care. It has about 70 employees and 69 residents at their Vancouver facility and about 130 staff and 100 residents at another facility in Burnaby.

The majority of the workers' injuries were caused by lifting and moving patients, including transferring residents in and out of wheelchairs, pulling up those who slipped down in their chairs, or lifting residents off the floor after a fall. While MSIs were the most common, Fair Haven workers had other injuries, caused by pulling on heavy wet laundry or from residents striking out at employees.

Taking advantage of the help offered both through WCB's Focus Firm Strategy and the Healthcare Benefit Trust, Fair Haven completed an MSI risk analysis, and put in effective controls to change the organization's attitude toward health and safety.

"We had seminars and workshops and we started to be more aware and started to use our ergonomic eye," says Leonida Baybay, a care aide and employee chair person of the joint MSIP committee. "We can now see the risk in doing the job. Workers look themselves for the risk in doing tasks. Most of us are now using the mechanical lift. We're not lifting residents by hand anymore if we can help it."

Fair Haven has put together an effective return-to-work program, complete with light-duties and case management for any injured worker. They now investigate all risks for violence to staff or residents to see where changes need to be made to their care plan and have established a formalized accident investigation procedure.

"We were very good at reporting accidents but we didn't do anything about them," says O'Malley. "We didn't know why they happened. We've now totally revised our whole incident reporting process to ensure that recommendations are carried out."

Fair Haven has lowered its claims costs and days lost due to injury. In 1999 they had 2,702 days lost, but in 2000 they only lost 1,142 days, nearly a 60 per cent reduction.

The company is currently building a new facility in Vancouver to replace the aging former dormitory that now houses its residents. The new facility will be the first in B.C. to be built fully equipped with a patient ceiling lift system.

"Because of our involvement with the firm and their increased knowledge of ergonomic risk," says Candace Mayes, WCB occupational safety officer in the Vancouver South region, "Fair Haven became more interested in what kind of changes could be incorporated into the new facility to decrease the risk of injury."

WCB recently sent a letter to Fair Haven management and staff congratulating them on their success. Baybay says the workers were really happy to have WCB acknowledge their efforts.

"We are so proud that we have done something that is also for our own good," she says. "It challenges us to do better to have a safe working environment for the staff and a safe homelike place for the residents. To reduce if not prevent MSI is our goal.

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