

Safe Patient Handling: A Report

Based On Quantitative Research Among
Nurses and Radiology Technicians

Conducted on Behalf of
AFT Healthcare

By Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc.

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Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., conducted two surveys for AFT Healthcare from February 22 to 25, 2006. One survey was conducted among 509 nurses who work in hospitals and provide direct patient care and were selected randomly from a list to ensure a nationally representative sample. The margin of error for this survey is ± 4.4 percentage points overall and is larger for certain subgroups. A second survey was conducted among 404 radiology technicians who work in hospitals and who also were randomly selected from a list to ensure a nationally representative sample. The margin of error for this survey is ± 5.0 percentage points overall and is larger for certain subgroups.

Executive Summary

This study of hospital nurses and radiology technicians reveals that their work has become extremely physically demanding, often resulting in job-related injury or chronic pain. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that employment as a health professional in a hospital today is backbreaking work. Many nurses and radiology technicians report that they have considered leaving patient care because of the physical demands of the job, which would only exacerbate the current shortage in those professions.

Job-related injuries and chronic pain are pervasive among hospital nurses and radiology technicians. Large majorities of nurses (56 percent) and radiology technicians (64 percent) report that they have suffered job-related chronic pain or on-the-job injuries resulting from lifting, moving, or repositioning patients. Hospital professionals feel that these problems are so urgent they require state regulatory action—82 percent of nurses and 85 percent of radiology technicians would support state standards to mandate that hospitals provide patient-moving equipment and training.

Fully 38 percent of nurses and 42 percent of radiology technicians have suffered an injury related to moving, lifting, or repositioning patients. One in four (24 percent) nurses has experienced multiple injuries, as have 26 percent of radiology technicians.

About one-half (48 percent) of nurses, and an even higher proportion of radiology technicians (58 percent), have experienced chronic pain that they associate with moving, lifting, or repositioning patients. For many, chronic pain is a long-term struggle. About one-third (31 percent) of nurses say that they have dealt with chronic pain for two years, and 32 percent of radiology technicians have struggled with chronic pain for at least a year.

Nurses and radiology technicians who have suffered from chronic pain or injuries on the job are much more likely to consider leaving patient care. Fully 47 percent of hospital nurses and 30 percent of radiology technicians report that they have considered leaving the patient care field because of their jobs' physical demands. Those figures rise to 59 percent for nurses who have suffered from job-related chronic pain or injuries, and to 40 percent for radiology technicians who have suffered from chronic pain or injury.

Many instances of chronic pain and on-the-job injuries require treatment and have serious implications for nurses and radiology techs. Remarkably, 38 percent of nurses and 47 percent of radiology technicians report that they have regularly reported to work with, and despite, chronic pain. In some cases, however, these hospital professionals are unable to work because

of pain or injury suffered on the job. One in four (24 percent) nurses has lost time due to chronic pain, and 22 percent due to injuries. Likewise, 20 percent of radiology technicians has lost work time due to chronic pain, and 20 percent due to injury.

The use of patient-moving equipment appears to reduce the risk of injury and chronic pain. However, many professionals do not have access to such equipment, or do not use it when available. Just 24 percent of all nurses and 27 percent of all radiology technicians regularly use equipment while moving patients. Remarkably, this study finds that regular equipment use is associated with a 23 percent reduction in the incidence of chronic pain and injury for these health professionals.

Findings

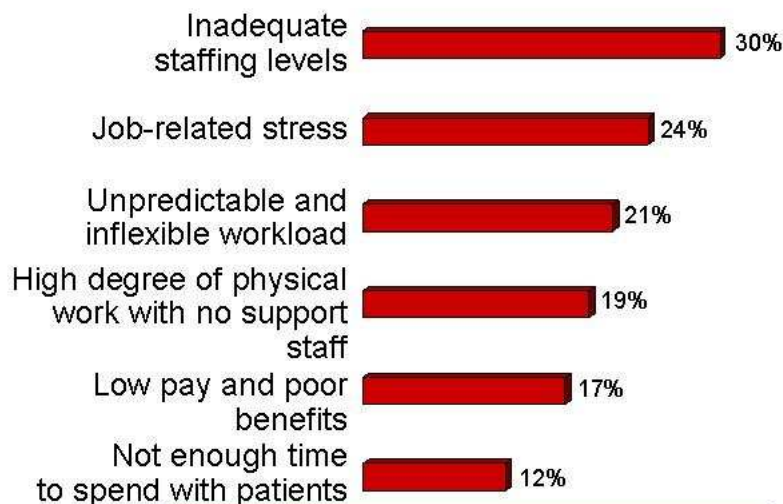
1 Job-related injuries and chronic pain are pervasive among hospital nurses and radiology technicians.

When we think about workplace injuries, blue-collar jobs in fields such as construction or manufacturing most readily come to mind—not the healthcare professions. However, hospital professionals’ work has become extremely physically demanding. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that employment as a health professional in a hospital today is backbreaking work.

Large majorities of both hospital nurses and radiology technicians report that they have suffered job-related chronic pain or on-the-job injuries resulting from lifting, moving or repositioning patients. Among nurses, 56 percent have suffered chronic pain and/or an injury that they associate with lifting or moving patients. Among radiology technicians, fully 64 percent have suffered chronic pain, injury or both.

Biggest Problems Among Radiology Techs

Selected one/two biggest problems with being a radiology tech today



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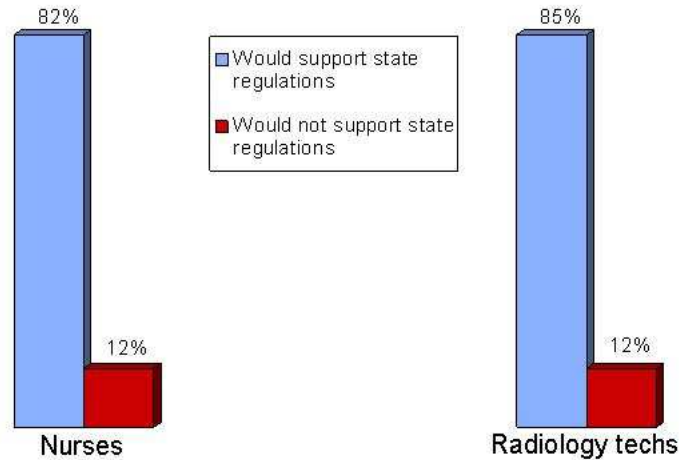
For some years now, nurses’ number-one job concern has been understaffing, and staffing remains a critical concern today. Astonishingly, however, the physical demands of the job have become so severe that these are now considered by nurses to be just as serious a problem as understaffing. When asked to select the two biggest problems facing their profession, 39 percent cite “stress and physical demands of the job,” approximately the same proportion who select understaffing (38 percent) and more than all other concerns.

- Fully 59 percent of nurses and 57 percent of radiology techs tell us that neck, back, or shoulder pain is a major or moderate problem for employees in their hospital.
- Chronic back pain specifically is reported as a major or moderate problem by 54 percent of nurses and 53 percent of radiology techs.

Hospital professionals feel that these problems are so urgent that they require state regulatory action. The vast majority of nurses and radiology technicians believe that their state should adopt regulations mandating that hospitals provide patient-moving equipment and relevant training. More than four in five nurses (82 percent) and radiology technicians (85 percent) would support state standards.

Support For State Regulations

Regulations requiring hospitals to adopt safety programs that provide appropriate lift equipment and training



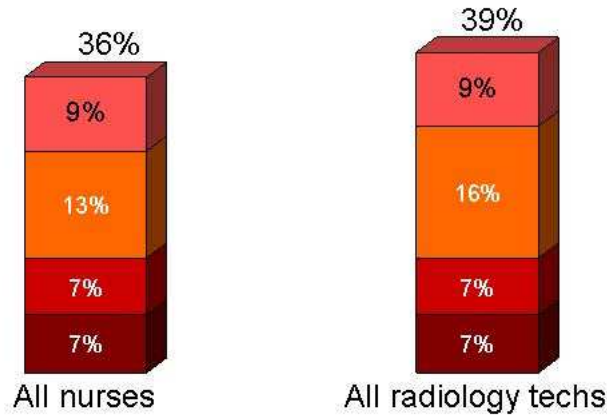
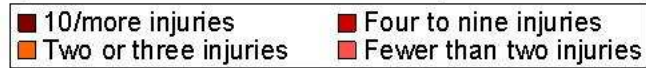
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2 Thirty-eight (38 percent) percent of nurses and 42 percent of radiology technicians have suffered an injury related to moving, lifting, or repositioning patients.

Nurses report that injuries are regular, not isolated, events. One in four (24 percent) nurses has experienced more than one injury at work, and 7 percent have experienced 10 or more injuries.

Number Of Injuries

How many back, shoulder, or neck injuries have you experienced over the course of your career?



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An even higher proportion (42 percent) of radiology technicians have suffered an injury while working. Multiple injuries also are common among radiology technicians; 26 percent report that they have experienced more than one injury and, like nurses, 7 percent have experienced 10 or more injuries.

3 Nearly half (48 percent) of nurses and nearly three in five (58 percent) radiology technicians have experienced chronic pain that they associate with moving, lifting, or repositioning patients.

About one in five (22 percent) nurses is currently experiencing chronic pain; 26 percent have experienced chronic pain in the past. Among radiology technicians, about one-quarter (27 percent) is currently experiencing chronic pain, and 31 percent have experienced chronic pain in the past.

Most nurses who currently deal with chronic pain say that it is a long-term struggle. More than one in five (21 percent) nurses say that they have experienced pain for more than three years, and three in ten (31 percent) say that they have experienced chronic pain for two years or more.

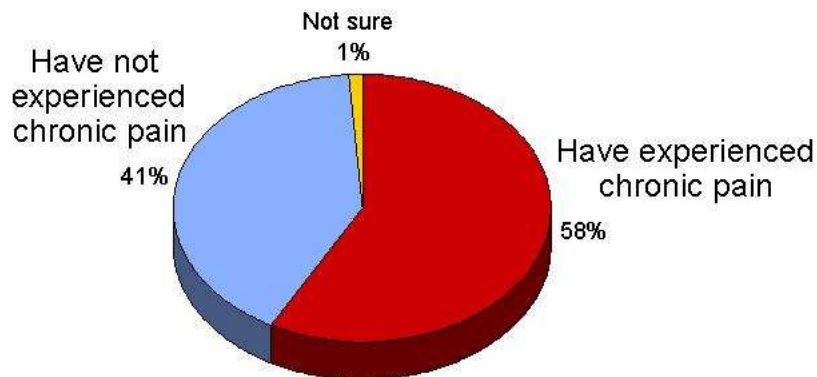
Chronic Pain Among Nurses



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Radiology technicians currently dealing with chronic pain agree that it is a long-term struggle. One-quarter (24 percent) of radiology technicians say that they have experienced chronic pain for a year or less, but 32 percent say that their chronic pain has lasted at least a year.

Chronic Pain Among Radiology Techs

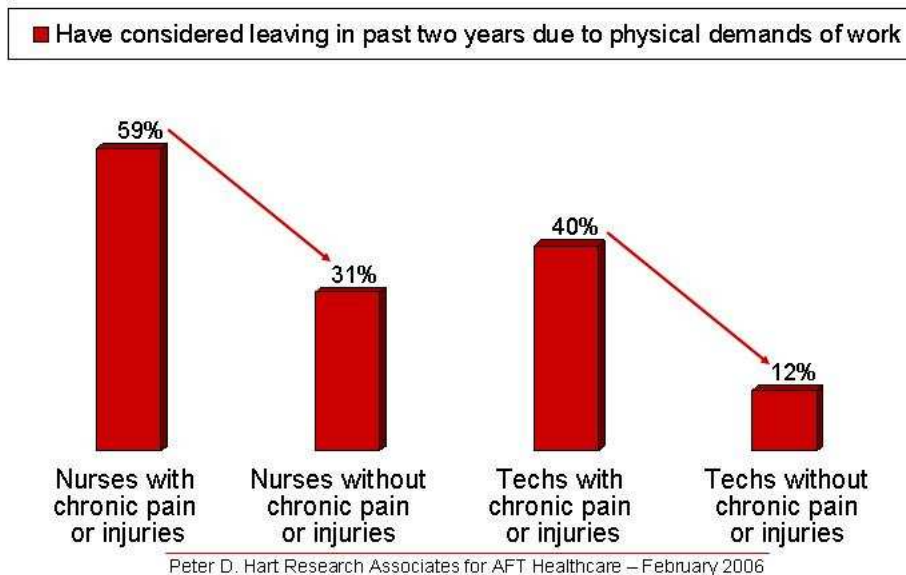


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4 Nurses and radiology technicians who have suffered from chronic pain or injuries on the job are much more likely to consider leaving the patient care field.

Among all nurses, slightly fewer than half (47 percent) have considered leaving their field during the past two years specifically because of their work's physical demands. The proportion of nurses who have considered leaving rises to 59 percent among those who have suffered from chronic pain or injuries, compared to 31 percent among those who have not experienced on-the-job pain or injury.

Proportions Who Have Considered Leaving



Similarly, 30 percent of radiology technicians have considered leaving their profession in the past two years due to physical demands. Among those who have dealt with chronic pain or injuries, 40 percent have considered leaving, versus just 12 percent of those who have not suffered pain or injury.

5 Many instances of chronic pain and on-the-job injuries require treatment and have serious implications for nurses and radiology techs.

A striking number of nurses and radiology technicians report working regularly with, and despite, chronic pain. Fully 38 percent of nurses and 47 percent of radiology technicians say that they have regularly reported to work while in pain at some period in their career.

The proportion of nurses and radiology technicians who say that they have worked while taking a prescription pain medication is particularly concerning and further illustrates this problem's seriousness. One in 10 (10 percent) nurses and 16 percent of radiology technicians say that they have worked while on a prescription pain medication.

IMPLICATIONS OF CHRONIC PAIN AND ON-THE-JOB INJURIES

	<u>Nurses</u>	<u>Radiology Technicians</u>
	%	%
Regularly worked with chronic pain	38	47
Sought medical attention for chronic pain	38	38
Sought medical attention for an on-the-job injury	26	26
Prescribed pain medication for chronic pain	25	29
Lost work time due to chronic pain	24	20
Lost work time due to on-the-job injury	22	20

Both nurses and radiology technicians report instances of chronic pain and injuries that are so serious that they seek medical attention. Thirty-eight percent of both nurses and radiology technicians have sought medical attention for chronic pain at some point in their careers, and one-quarter (26 percent) of nurses and radiology technicians have sought medical attention for work-related injuries. One in four (25 percent) nurses and 29 percent of radiology technicians have been prescribed pain medications for their chronic pain.

About one in four (34 percent) nurses who have experienced on-the-job injuries, and one in three (41 percent) radiology technicians who have experienced on-the-job injuries did not report those injuries to their employer in at least one instance. The most common reasons for not reporting injuries among both groups of hospital employees are that injuries are just part of the job, it's not worth making a report because nothing will happen, and not having enough time.

In some cases, nurses and radiology technicians are unable to work due to pain and have lost work time. One in four (24 percent) nurses say that they have lost work time due to chronic pain related to lifting, transferring, or repositioning patients. Indeed, approximately half of this group has been forced to take vacation days or unpaid leave because of pain. Many nurses report taking off multiple vacation days to deal with pain.

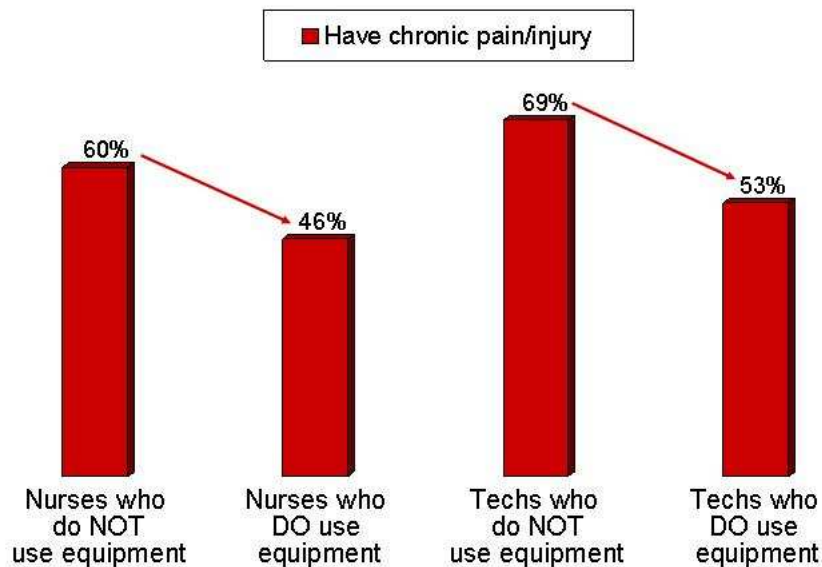
The story is similar among radiology technicians. One in five (20 percent) radiology technicians have lost work time due to pain, and about half of this group also has taken vacation days or unpaid leave because of pain. Also like nurses, when radiology techs must take unpaid leave, it is more often for an extended period of time than for just a day or two.

Nurses and radiology technicians have also found themselves losing work time due to injuries, in addition to chronic pain. One in five (22 percent) nurses and radiology technicians (20 percent) have lost work time due to injuries, and about half of both groups of nurses and radiology technicians have been forced to use vacation days or take unpaid leave because of injuries that they sustained on the job.

6 The use of patient-moving equipment appears to reduce the risk of injury and chronic pain. However, many professionals do not have access to such equipment, or do not use it when available.

Mechanical equipment for use in lifting, moving, or repositioning patients is available to 64 percent of nurses, and fewer than half (46 percent) of radiology technicians; conversely, 33 percent of nurses and 53 percent of radiology technicians report that such equipment is not available in their hospital. In addition, even in hospitals where equipment is available, many hospital workers lift and move patients without mechanical assistance: 60 percent of technicians and just 37 percent of nurses in these hospitals say they “generally use” the equipment. Taking both factors into account, we find that just 24 percent of all nurses and 27 percent of all radiology technicians generally use equipment while moving patients.

Incidence Of Pain And/Or Injury



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The data from this survey strongly suggest that more widespread availability and use of patient-moving equipment could help to reduce workplace injuries and chronic pain among hospital professionals. The majority (60 percent) of nurses who do not have access to or do not generally use equipment have experienced job-related chronic pain and/or injuries. However, that percentage falls to just 46 percent for nurses who have and use equipment. Similarly, 69 percent of radiology technicians who do not use equipment report chronic pain and/or injuries, versus 53 percent of technicians who use equipment when moving patients. **This means that equipment use is associated with a very substantial 23 percent reduction in the reported incidence of pain and injury for both professions.**

Nurses and radiology technicians generally offer the same principal explanations for why they do not use equipment when it is available to them: a perception that the equipment is just not needed in most cases (45 percent of nurses; 42 percent of technicians), the equipment is not conveniently located (33 percent of nurses; 35 percent of technicians), and it is difficult to

maneuver the equipment in patients' rooms (30 percent of nurses; 20 percent of radiology technicians).

Nurses (86 percent) and radiology technicians (83 percent) both say that their hospital has a written policy on the proper procedure for patient lifts and transfers. Beyond a written policy, most hospital employees—90 percent of nurses, 89 percent of radiology technicians—also report that their hospital provides training on safe lifting. The type of training varies among hospitals. Among nurses, 30 percent say that their hospital only provides training on body mechanics, while 58 percent say the hospital provides training on body mechanics and equipment use. Among radiology technicians, 34 percent say that their hospital only provides body mechanics training and 54 percent say it provides both kinds of training.