Gait Belt Versus Walking Belt with Handles

There are a very wide variety of belts on the market that provide stabilization for ambulatory residents by allowing workers to hold onto the belt and support residents when walking. In these situations, an object with handles greatly improves the grasp opportunity for the worker and thereby reduces the risk for a patient handling injury.

OSHA views walking belts as a superior product, as they can help protect both the resident and caregiver from injury. Nursing assistants should receive training on how to use the walking belt. They will learn a rocking and pulling motion that makes the transfer easier to do. This motion uses the weight of the resident to help with the transfer. There is not much force required to perform this task. The good points of a walking belt with handles include:

- Wide and sturdy belt equipped with buckles and Velcro for a good quick fit.
- Handles on each side make it easier to grip. The handles also provide for better arm position for pulling.
- No forceful grasping is required. Less pressure from fingers and knuckles against the resident, increasing the patient’s comfort.
- When used correctly, walking belts reduce the force on the discs in the caregiver’s lower back. (Garg and Owen, 1992)

On the other hand, a typical gait belt is a simple canvas-walking belt used to support residents who can walk with assistance. They can also help the nursing assistant protect themselves from slipping and falling residents. Several negative points with the standard gait belt are as follows:

- They can slide up on a resident, causing scrapes and skin tears. They can also push into the resident’s ribcage.
- They are not safe to use with heavy residents.
- They can be stressful to the caregiver’s hands and wrists.
- They can be uncomfortable for the resident due to the knuckles of the caregiver digging into their body.
- Caregivers tend to use the gait belt as a lift device.

Walking belts are more costly; however, the payback in loss reduction could be significant as well. The walking belts tend to run small so a larger selection of larger sizes will be needed. Most facilities have found that the most effective and efficient use is to assign the walking belt to the resident. This allows the correct size belt to be maintained with the resident.

There are a variety of transfer belts available. The safe patient handling and mobility website has information on a variety of products available. The safe patient handling and mobility website is http://www.patientsafety.va.gov/