

UPLIFTING Options

For an immobile person, young or old, the process of getting from one place to another requires a tremendous amount of effort. Often, they must depend on the services of a caregiver to physically move them.;

Mechanical patient lifts are designed to assist in transferring a person from one area to another. In doing so, they not only help the user, but also decrease the risk of strain and injury to the caregiver, according to rehab professionals who spoke with *TeamRehab Report*:

"Manual lifting is a lot of work for the caregiver, especially as a young child grows," says Annette Volland-Kerber, P.T., supervisor of physical therapy, Crippled Children's Hospital and School, Sioux Falls, SD. "The child starts to get bigger than their mom, and she's still lifting them onto the toilet seat."

According to rehab professionals, patient lifts are also important because they can reduce the amount of friction or skin shear a person might otherwise experience when being moved.

"Patients should not be dragged across a surface. Lifting devices should be used because friction is a common problem that is often the beginning of pressure ulcers," says Glenda Motta, R.N., M.P.H., E.T., of G.M. & Associates in Silver Springs, Md. "The problem is the way in which you trans-

fer the person - if you drag them, you increase the friction force?"

"Regardless of which lift you look at, a properly applied lift can save the caregiver's back, land save the user from falling or developing skin sores," says Joel Lerich, president, Rand-Scot Inc., Fort Collins, Colo.

Still, while patient lifts ultimately offer many benefits for both caregiver and user, sometimes families express reluctance at bringing one into the home.

"We get a lot of resistance from people," notes Judy Freyermuth, P.T., Forge Pond Nursing Home, East & Gewater, Mass. "Seeing the lift makes the reality of something being wrong with their spouse or child more visible or real. They have to get over that initial hump. Once they start using it, they realize it's not a big deal."

TRANSFER TYPES

For the transfer of a person from bed to wheelchair or commode, several types of lifts are available. The traditional sling-type patient lifts are usually divided into three categories: battery-operated or hydraulic floor lift, ceiling-mounted track lift, and free-standing overhead track lift. New to the market are several transfer/lift devices which move a patient without a sling. There are also a variety of motorized lifts, not considered here, designed specifically for transporting

Patient lifts can prove a helpful tool in both home and institutional settings.

When choosing a lift, primary considerations include the user's physical condition and surroundings, the caregiver's capabilities long- or short-term goals, cost and funding.

By Kimberly Pfaff, TeamRehab Report

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patients up and down stairs, or in and out of bathtubs and automobiles.

The floor lift features a wheeled base and an overhead swivel bar. A sling, usually canvas or nylon, is placed under the user and attached to the swivel bar. The user can then either be pivoted on the device's base at the transfer site or wheeled to the desired area and then transferred. Usually, these lifts can be easily disassembled.

Critical factors when considering a ceiling track system are whether a person lives in a house, mobile home or rental situation, and how much renovation is required to install it.

Two common styles for the support base on this type of lift are a U- and a C-shape. The legs of the U-shaped base may be opened wider for greater stability, or narrowed to maneuver through a tight space. While the legs of the C-shaped base are not flexible, this design generally moves more easily through narrow doorways.

"It's trial and error," points out Volland-Kerber. "It depends on where you are transferring the person."

Ceiling track systems work on the same principle, except that the sling setup is attached to a ceiling-mounted track. An electric or hydraulic motor is used to raise the person, who can then be moved mechanically or manually, along the track.

While this type of system is by definition a more permanent option, the customized track may be as simple or elaborate as desired. Many of these systems run on bat-

tery power. Some also offer a remote control option.

Among the primary considerations for this type of lift are whether a person lives in a house, mobile home or rental situation, and how much renovation is required to install it.

Other factors to consider, says Karen McCord, president of Huntington Beach, Calif.-based I TEC, include whether there is a manual backup in case of power failure; weight restrictions; the lift's travel speed

(both vertically and horizontally); availability of parts and technical assistance; length of warranty; and whether a licensed contractor will install it.

Freestanding overhead track lifts are a less expensive, portable alternative to ceiling tracks. Here, the horizontal track or frame, is supported by two vertical posts, allowing it to be dismantled and used in different locations.

DECIDING FACTORS

Correctly chosen, lifts can benefit the caregiver, as well as the person using the device. Therapists who spoke with *TeamRehab Report* noted that a variety of considerations go into determining which type of lift is appropriate. Of primary concern are the patient's condition, the physical capability of the caregiver; the user's environment, cost and reimbursement.

Just as critical are the goals established by the rehab team, including the user, and the purpose the lift will serve.

"You have to consider the patient's and caregiver's list of priorities," says Volland-Kerber. "What areas or rooms are you transferring the person to? Are you ever going to have to transfer the individual to a car?"

Therapists stress that care should be taken

to meet the user's individual requirements for support and stability with the proper sling. Manufacturers generally offer several types of seating designs, and will often customize a particular size if necessary. Additional options to look for include sling extensions and head supports for people with poor muscle control.

There are some patients for whom a lift is not appropriate. Because the typical sling seat doesn't offer a great deal of support, it's important to keep in mind a patient's orthopedic restrictions, says Freyermuth. For example, a patient with a total hip replacement, she notes, would not be a lift candidate.

"I have a woman now who has Huntington's Correa," Freyermuth says. "She has a lot of extraneous movements — she flails her arms and legs around. That's difficult to handle in a lift. There are all types of considerations. What are the patient's movement patterns? Do they have a lot of spasticity? If they're in a special chair that breaks their tone up, and then you put them in a lift, do they spasm out?"

While using a patient lift prevents the friction that occurs when a patient is transferred across a surface, sometimes the sling itself can increase the risk of pressure sores. Therapists who spoke with

Report all stressed the importance of making sure the sling is not creased and is wrinkle-free, so as to avoid skin irritation and breakdown.

In addition, they pointed out that problems such as decubitus ulcers can occur with lift systems that require the patient to remain seated on the sling even after being transferred.

"The chair cushion is designed to be

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therapeutic, so that you have the patient achieve a desired number of hours being seated throughout the day." says Kathi Whitaker, R.N., B.S.N., E.T., board certified, in private practice in St. Louis, Mo. "Slings can defeat the purpose and function of the cushion."

There are ways to get around this, she notes. "How I combat that is I have the caregiver put the sling on the bed, and put the therapeutic cushioning device under the

patient, on top of the sling, for a sandwich effect. I try to get the best of both worlds."

The potential for infection is another concern among therapists, particularly in institutional settings, where, because of budget constraints, several patients often share the same sling.

"Risk of contamination is a real problem," says Whitaker. She recalled a situation in one facility, where she observed the same transfer

board and sling being used to move several people who had pressure sores. One man in particular, she noticed, had a very bad infection.

"I told the nursing staff they needed to wipe the board down and make sure the sling was clean," she says. "They went right down the hall and used the same board and sling on another patient. I went to the head infection control practitioner, and asked her to do a culture. A culture was done which

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demonstrated that the bacteria had been transferred to the device."

There is also the question of battery-powered vs. hydraulic lift systems. While some people feel the battery system provides a smoother ride, others prefer the ease of a hydraulic jack.

Wilma Knobloch, director of nursing at Tuff Memorial Hospital in Hills, Minn., says her facility currently uses a hydraulic floor lift, but is checking into a battery-operated system. "The advantage of a battery-powered system is that it would be a smoother ride, and it would not stain the bedspreads," she says, noting that the hydraulic device sometimes leaks.

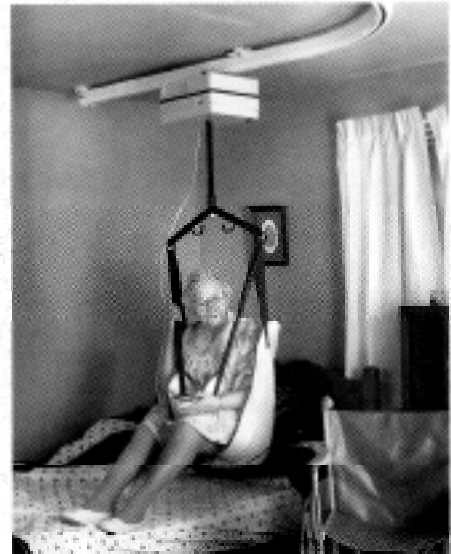
NEXT 'GENERATION

In the past few years, a new breed of patient transfer products has also emerged. Recent entrants to the field are moving away from the traditional sling concept and offering alternative approaches.

Linda Wasser, O.T.R., senior therapist for occupational therapy and rehab services at the University of Minnesota Hospital and Clinic in Minneapolis, says that in addition to a traditional floor lift, she recently began using the Easy Pivot, a manual, lever-op-



Invacare 9802 This unit's hydraulic pump handle can be rotated from side to side for the convenience of the caregiver. The device lifts patients up to 450 pounds, and its offset mast and boom design provides an optimum lift path. Circle 346 on the reader service card.



C-4 Ceiling Track System This unit features air tube controls that can be operated by push button or blow tube. A variety of track designs are available, including straight, curved, change of direction and transverse, as well as a freestanding frame. Battery-operated. From Barrier Free Lifts. Circle 343 on the reader service card.



CindyLift This device works on a pivot principle, weighs less than 40 pounds, and is small enough to maneuver through tight spaces and store in a closet. The horizontal resting position gives the user relief from bed or chair pressure points. From CindyLift Products. Circle 348 on the reader service card.

erated device that allows a caregiver to lift a person using the standing pivot technique, then wheel them to the desired location.

"It allows you to access somebody's bottom side for cleaning or removing pants," Wasser says. She notes that although the device has good potential for home use, "It would not be good for someone with respiratory problems, because they are in a forward position with a great deal of chest compression." She also believes it might not be appropriate for a bilateral amputee, because they require a lot of support in order to pivot.

Vollan-Kerber says staff members at her facility have experimented with the CindyLift, a wheeled device that operates on the principle of a hand truck or dolly.

"The device firmly supports the user at the knees, under the buttocks, and around the trunk so that demands for trunk control are minimal," she says. "There is also the opportunity for the client to use their upper extremities for propping if they have the capability.

"If head support is of concern, an anterior headpiece exists to allow the forehead to comfortably rest or be supported," she adds.

Also new is the Love Lift, a combination power-driven wheelchair and power lift that started production this year. At 22 inches wide, the Love Lift is narrow enough to be wheeled easily through doorways or between a bed and a wall.

One of the device's options is a combination toilet/stretcher seat that enables the user to back the chair over a regular toilet seat without transferring, as well as be moved onto a bed in a reclining position.

FUNDING SOURCES

Manufacturers and industry executives interviewed by *TeamRehab Report* agreed that while funding for patient lifts remains a major concern, there is help available.

For mobile or freestanding lifts, the situation is generally good, sources report. In some states, Medicaid and private insurance will often cover the cost of a lift, provided it's medically necessary.

For ceiling-mounted track systems, however, the funding situation varies. And the cost here is twofold: the purchase price of

the lift, as well as the installation fee. Depending on the extent of the layout, the cost for ceiling track systems can run to about \$10,000 installed, according to designer Todd Brickhouse, of Brickhouse Design Group, Ltd., Massapequa Park, N.Y. His firm installs a variety of vertical lifts, stairway lifts and other mobility aids.

While Medicare pays for portable hydraulic lifts, it does not cover lifts that are attached to any part of the house, including ceiling or even bath lifts, according to Lisa Thomas-

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Payne, president, Medical Reimbursement Systems, Albuquerque, N.M. Additionally, she notes, Medicare, which classifies lifts as capped rental devices, requires that the patient be confined to a bed or wheelchair, and that movement is necessary in order to improve their condition or arrest their deterioration.

While Medicaid guidelines differ from state to state, Thomas-Payne observes that lifts are usually a prior-authorized item, meaning that each patient's case is considered independently. "It's probably rare that Medicaid would cover the ceiling-type lift, but that certainly doesn't mean that is not a possibility," she says.

For consumers attempting the private-insurance route, there is no general prior authorization requirement, but Thomas-Payne notes there is a supplier-initiated insurance verification. "That should take place prior to delivery of the product," she says. "It verifies that the patient has coverage, and that the lift is a covered benefit under their policy. It's both patient- and policy-specific."

And, she points out, consumers must not overlook charitable organizations. |



Easy Pivot This device uses the standing pivot technique to transfer a person. The absence of a sling shows the caregiver access to the user's buttocks for toileting, hygiene and skin-checking purposes. From Rand-Scot Inc. Circle 349 on the reader service card.



Love Lift This combination power wheelchair and patient lift features an optional toilet/stretcher seat that enables a person to use a standard toilet as well as transfer in a reclining position onto a bed. The chair fits through a 22-inch doorway, and folds to fit in most car trunks. From Love Lift System. Circle 344 on the reader service card.