

MEMIC Assists Healthcare Workers in Preventing Injuries

PORTLAND, Maine -- To help reduce healthcare worker injuries through improved safe patient handling, MEMIC is now providing newly designed safe assist belts (commonly referred to as gait belts) free of charge to several hundred of its healthcare policyholders across the Eastern Seaboard. Safety management consultants on MEMIC's healthcare safety service team will hand deliver the belts and provide training on the proper use of these new, ergonomically improved gait belts.



MEMIC safety management consultants for the territories of Florida, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine pick up safe assist belts at MEMIC's Albany, New York office.

"I've been in the care giving business a long time and patient handling has changed tremendously," says Beth Stowell, who has promoted safe patient handling across the country as a safety management consultant at MEMIC for more than 20 years. "When I started in nursing school the 'hook and toss' method of raising people up by their armpits was the norm but that method can actually do damage to the patient's or resident's shoulder."

As a result, the traditional gait belt – a device that wraps around a patient's waist and was originally intended for caregivers to assist the patient with walking and ambulation – became a common method for patient lifting. Stowell says the misuse of the device as "patient handles" to lift patients increases the chance of injury to the caregiver and can be uncomfortable for the patient.

Southridge Rehabilitation and Living Center in Biddeford, Maine was first to receive the safe assist belt from MEMIC. Stowell demonstrated to Administrator Eric Pooler how the push-pull method, enhanced by the ergonomic design and vertical handles of the safe assist belt, is far easier and less stressful on the caregiver's body than the riskier lifting methods that are too often practiced with conventional gait belts. Indeed, healthcare workers suffer higher rates of musculoskeletal injuries than any other occupation. These injuries are often caused by manually lifting and moving hospital patients and elder-care residents. Improved training like that provided by Stowell and her fellow safety management consultants, reinforced by improved tools like the safe assist belt, could help make a dent in the estimated \$20 billion annually in direct and indirect costs associated with back injuries in the healthcare industry, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

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“The older style belts are not easy to use. Staff don’t like them, nor do the residents,” said Pooler after Stowell showed how the safe assist belts are wider with extra padding and a slip resistant lining for enhanced patient comfort. “I believe our staff will find success in adopting MEMIC’s safe assist belt program because the belts are so much easier to use with the resident. And because the residents like the comfort of it, they may ask for it more often.”

MEMIC has invested more than ten thousand dollars in the safe assist belt program so that caregivers and employers will see the benefits these belts have in providing superior care and reducing injuries. MEMIC has also negotiated a discounted rate from the manufacturer to make it that much easier for facilities to replace their older belts and lifting methods.

“We are tremendously excited about this opportunity to provide a win-win-win for patients, healthcare workers and their employers through safe patient handling improvements,” says Stowell.

Healthcare workers suffer higher rates of musculoskeletal injuries than any other occupation. These injuries are often caused by manually lifting and moving patients in hospitals or residents in elder care facilities. The ergonomically improved safe assist belt can help improve quality of care and reduce caregiver injuries through improved safe patient handling.



MEMIC safety management consultant Beth Stowell providing a safe assist belt to Eric Pooler, administrator at Southridge Rehabilitation and Living Center in Biddeford, Maine.

About MEMIC

The MEMIC Group includes MEMIC Indemnity Company, MEMIC Casualty Company, and parent company Maine Employers’ Mutual Insurance Company; all rated “A” (Excellent) by A.M. Best. As a super-regional workers’ compensation specialty insurer, The MEMIC Group holds licenses to write workers’ compensation in 46 states plus the District of Columbia. The group insures more than 20,000 employers and their estimated 300,000 employees, and holds more than \$1 billion in assets. The group maintains offices in Manchester, NH; Glastonbury, CT; Albany, NY; Weehawken, NJ; West Conshohocken, PA; Tysons Corner, VA; and Tampa, FL; in addition to its headquarters in Portland, ME.