

Advocating for Oregon's Hospitals & the Patients They Serve

Committee: Senate Health Care and Human Services
Bill: SB 572
Date: March 4, 2013
From: Andi Easton, associate vice president of government affairs and advocacy

On behalf of Oregon's 58 acute care hospitals, the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems appreciates the opportunity to comment about Senate Bill 572, which would implement safe patient handling standards at hospitals.

Oregon hospital leaders understand the challenges that front-line health care providers face in the safe lifting and moving of patients, and are appreciative of the intent behind SB 572 to keep patients and staff safe. However, Oregon hospitals have several concerns about this bill, including the fact that it is a redundant mandate and that the bill's timing is premature because its tenets may not align with the American Nurses Association standards on safe patient handling that are due to be published in March 2013.

All hospitals are required to have employee safety committees, as outlined by Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Act, and 85 percent of Oregon hospitals already have a committee focused on patient safe handling procedures and policies, according to surveys conducted by the Oregon Coalition on Healthcare Ergonomics. Mandating another standalone committee as this bill would do fails to promote an integrated approach to patient safety. Hospitals need the ability to utilize staff and resources effectively and efficiently. Rather than requiring yet another committee to address a narrow aspect of patient care, hospitals leaders must have the flexibility to integrate this work into existing committees. Our hospital leaders have already demonstrated that safe patient handling work can be effectively woven into the work of existing employee safety committees.

This bill would require that hospitals have patient lift equipment for every 10 beds. In addition to being an expensive mandate, it doesn't always make sense to have the same requirements for all hospitals. This aspect of the bill would drive up costs without commensurate improvements in patient or staff safety.

In addition to the problems listed above, this bill fails to address the "big picture" for patient safety. While the intent of this bill is to enhance the safety of patients and health care workers, Oregon hospitals are surprised that the relating clause is limited solely to hospitals. Hospitals are not the only health care facilities that lift patients frequently; long term care facilities do as well.

Although we would advise against moving this bill forward, OAHHS respectfully requests that should the bill advance lawmakers create a workgroup including members from Oregon Coalition on Healthcare Ergonomics (OCHE) and the hospital and long term care industries to address needed fixes to the bill and to ensure that it aligns appropriately with the American Nurses Association's soon-to-be-released recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment about this important legislation.