

Safe Patient Handling and Mobility Toolkit – Tool 2e

To learn more about using this tool refer to the Section 2 in the Safe Patient Handling and Mobility: A Toolkit for Program Development 2025 at: <https://www.nvha.net/safe-patient-handling-and-mobility-toolkit/>

Safe Patient Handling and Mobility (SPHM) Program Manager/Coordinator Job Description

Introduction

Appointing a SPHM program coordinator or manager is crucial for ensuring the ongoing success and sustainability of the program following initial implementation efforts.

A recent article in American Nurse Journal highlights the significant contribution and importance of *dedicated* SPHM coordinators to the effectiveness of SPHM programs (Kielich et al., 2025).

In a review of the comprehensive nationwide Veterans' Health Administration SPHM program, researchers found that having an effective SPHM coordinator plays a key role in program sustainability (Powell-Cope et al., 2014).

SPHM programs are multifaceted and require ongoing management to be effective. Therefore, it is recommended that there is at least one full-time coordinator per facility. Small facilities such as Critical Access hospitals may be able to implement and maintain their program with a part-time program coordinator. Alternatively, if having a full-time SPHM coordinator is not feasible, the program could be managed by 1 person who is responsible for SPHM and a related patient safety initiative such as an early mobility or fall prevention program.

Job Function - Overall

Kielich et al., states that the SPHM coordinator/manager oversees the development, implementation, evaluation, continuous improvement and ongoing sustainability of the facility's safe patient handling and mobility program. They act as advocate, expert and liaison between patient outcomes, caregiver safety, and safe mobility practices across the organization (Kielich et al, 2025).

Placement/Reporting Structure

The SPHM program and the program coordinator should be positioned within a health care organization to optimize effectiveness of the program and create a sense of urgency regarding SPHM practices and culture change (Kielich et al., 2025).

Patient mobilization is a core nursing task and SPHM practices support safe early mobility and falls and pressure injury prevention. Therefore, having the SPHM program coordinator/manager report to senior nursing leadership and the program placed within nursing or patient care services can increase effectiveness and leverage existing resources.

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If the SPHM program and coordinator is placed in an employee health and safety program (i.e., occupational health), or other non-nursing department, ensure that there is a strong link to nursing leadership and patient care.

Qualifications

The SPHM coordinator will support and facilitate problem solving activities to address high-risk patient handling tasks and SPHM needs for specific patient populations such as patients of size. Additionally, they provide SPHM training for unit-based champions, front-line caregivers and other stakeholders. If unit-based SPHM champions are not present in a SPHM program, the SPHM coordinator will be the primary clinical expert who is expected to lead efforts to address specific SPHM needs of patients.

As such they should have extensive knowledge about the topic of SPHM and ideally, they have direct patient care experience that includes use of SPHM technology and practices.

A minimum of a bachelor's degree, 2 to 5 years' experience and licensure in healthcare-related field is recommended (Kielich et al., 2025). Certification in SPHM or occupational ergonomics is preferred (*Refer to Section 10*).

A clinical background in nursing or therapy is highly recommended or at least a knowledge of risk management as related to occupational ergonomics, health, and safety.

SPHM programs impact many departments in a facility and require changes in work processes, therefore a coordinator who has knowledge of systems thinking, LEAN strategies and change management is also useful. Project management experience, including the ability to manage and analyze data and develop a business case for the SPHM program is essential.

Other important skills and abilities include:

- Effective written and oral communication skills
- Experience in leading or facilitation of projects and teams or groups
- Training and 'coaching' experience
- Computer skills

Lastly a program coordinator/manager who demonstrates genuine enthusiasm for the program and its objectives can inspire stakeholders, build strong relationships, foster a positive culture, and drive overall success.

Further education and development of advanced SPHM skills could be obtained from reviewing this SPHM toolkit and key references and resources provided and participating in webinars and conferences through organizations such as the Association of Safe Patient Handling Professionals (ASPHP).

Training may be available with an experienced SPHM trainer/ or consultant or with SPHM coordinator(s) at other health care facilities in the same geographic area, who are willing to be a mentor. (Matz et al., 2019)

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Job Functions

The following are examples of responsibilities.

- Collaborates with facility leadership and management to develop, implement, evaluate, manage and maintain a SPHM program that achieves established goals and meets any state regulatory requirements and national SPHM standards.
- Provides leadership to and facilitates the activities of the SPHM committee to facilitate development, implementation and management of the SPHM program communications plan and related activities.
- Document and communicate program activities to stakeholders.
- Oversight of SPHM technology selection, installation, and management to ensure the availability and safety of SPHM equipment and supplies, addressing both current and future needs while maintaining compliance with performance measures and clinical standards.
- Collaborates with facility design and construction, architects, facilities management and procurement/purchasing groups to facilitate the above activities and ensures that SPHM and ergonomics needs are considered in new construction and building remodeling projects.
- Develop and manage SPHM processes such as, SPHM patient mobility assessment protocols, in collaboration key stakeholders and departments such as rehabilitation, employee health and safety, infection and prevention control, wound and ostomy, patient safety -fall prevention, early mobility programs etc.
- Manages/facilitates the unit-based SPHM champion program including champion training and point-of-care support.
- Collaborates with clinical education to develop and maintain the SPHM education and training program including development and evaluation of stakeholder competencies, training content and materials.
- Conducts SPHM education and training to multiple stakeholder groups and/or trains other staff to become SPHM trainers.
- Conducts worksite evaluations to identify and quantify (as needed) patient handling related injury risks.
- Provides continuous evaluation of the SPHM Program performance measures including collection and analysis of injury data, staff surveys, worksite audits etc.
- Conducts audits and is a regular presence on patient care units/dept., to promote evidence-based practice for SPHM, identifies and promptly addresses high-risk work practices.
- Provides just-in time-training/coaching as needed on units/department in the SPHM program to support specific staff and patient related SPHM needs.
- Provides consulting support as an expert in SPHM and bariatric care. Collaborates with the care team to address specific SPHM issues such as patient/family refusal to use SPHM technology.
- Is involved in incident investigation, mitigation and return to work program activities.
- Attends continuing education opportunities to maintain professional skills and competence in SPHM and program management.

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References & Resources

Duke MOVES Program: Falls and Safe Patient Handling and Mobility (SPHM). Manager Role Description 2018. <https://www.safety.duke.edu/sites/default/files/Manager%20Role%20Description.pdf>

Kielich, R., Jaworski, T., Boynton, T., & Hopewell, N. (2025, June). Who handles the handling? A look at the need for a full-time dedicated Safe Patient Handling and Mobility Coordinator. American Nurse Journal. <https://www.myamericannurse.com/who-handles-the-handling/>

Matz M, Celona J, Martin M, McCoskey K, Nelson GG. (2019). Patient Handling and Mobility Assessments (2nd ed.). https://www.fgiguideelines.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FGI-Patient-Handling-and-Mobility-Assessments_191008.pdf

Powell-Cope, G., Toyinbo, P., Patel, N., Rugs, D., Elnitsky, C., Hahm, B., ... & Hodgson, M. (2014). Effects of a national safe patient handling program on nursing injury incidence rates. JONA: The Journal of Nursing Administration, 44(10), 525-534.

Veteran's Health Administration. Safe Patient Handling and Mobility Guidebook (Jan 2016). Center for Engineering & Occupational Safety and Health (CEOSH). St. Louis, Missouri. https://www.stryker.com/content/dam/stryker/education-and-training/focusrn/resources/caregiver-safety/implementation-tools/VA%20SPHM_PDF.pdf