Implementing technology to improve patient and staff safety

At Washington Hospital, we are committed to ensuring the safety of our patients and staff. Safe and efficient practices are especially important when it comes to repositioning or transporting patients.

In 2018, a multidisciplinary group consisting of members from Employee Health, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Perioperative Services, Critical Care, Transport, Medical Imaging, Biomedical Engineering, the Emergency Department, Obstetrics, Medical-Surgical, and Nursing Administration collaborated to implement the AirPal (air-assisted lateral patient transfer system) device at the Hospital.

AirPal works by inflating a pad underneath the patient to create a cushion of air that keeps them comfortable during transfers from beds to stretchers or procedure tables. The AirPal device is placed under a patient in the same manner as changing a bed sheet. It is then inflated, releasing low-pressure air through its perforated chambers. Use of the AirPal is especially effective for patients who are physically unable to move themselves due to decreased physical strength, size, or medical condition.

Transferring patients using AirPal also decreases the risk of musculoskeletal injury to nursing staff — a common physical hazard that has traditionally threatened the well-being of health care workers. The AirPal allows for patients to comfortably hover during the transfer without staff members exerting unnecessary energy, or risking injury to their back, neck, arms or legs.

Work-related staff injuries can develop into short- and long-term consequences, including loss of work hours and permanent loss of function. Since the implementation of the AirPal at Washington Hospital, transfer injuries to staff members have decreased.

(From left) Transporter John Peterson and Cath Lab nurses Teresa Guy, BSN, RN, and Keri Sheldon, BSN, RN, safely and comfortably transfer a patient using the AirPal device.