

From Patient Handling to Materials Handling – A Journey of an Ergonomist



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Abstract: In the ever-changing world of technology and globally diverse generation of workers, the application of ergonomics in injury prevention and control at any workplace has become increasingly challenging. With a variety of industries that demand this unique expertise it can be difficult for an ergonomics professional to settle on just one area of skillset – should we and how difficult is it to switch to a different field and still educate and implement best ergonomics solutions for everyone.

The medical industry has a long history of worker injuries with manual handling of patients. The increase in obesity in both workers and patients has increased this challenge. For many years, the medical industry has relied on the teaching of correct body mechanics as the solution to worker protection. Team lifting and teaching transfers of patients as a manual “art” has led to career ending injuries. Manual handling in other industries is also a long-standing practice. For example, warehousing industry involves lifting and transferring of furniture, mattresses, large thin-screen TV’s and other awkward items. In the medical field a 400-pound incapacitated patient that cannot assist with his or her own movement can offer similar challenges as the 400-pound sofa being stored and packed for delivery. Automation has started in many areas of warehousing but it has not necessarily made the human-machine interface easier. Technology as well as tools to assess risk can be applied to both fields of medical and warehousing industries to improve ergonomics but application needs careful consideration.

Come explore the differences and similarities that one ergonomist discovered in switching fields later in her career from Healthcare Ergonomics to Global Industrial Ergonomics, and learn how career stimulating the challenges can be in identifying and implementing best practices that we always strive for at the workplace.