

Key Points to Consider in the Selection of Slings for Hoisting Clients

This article outlines some important considerations in the selection of slings for particular individuals. A future article will discuss the selection of hoists.

Introduction

Many clients have complex needs and will require hoisting, and therefore slings, for use in a variety of situations. It is possible that more than one sling may be needed to meet the needs of an individual client. Moreover, in a setting where more than one client will be hoisted, such as a hospital or day centre, it is likely that a range of slings may be required.

Selecting a sling for an individual is not just a simple matter of measuring the size of the client and deciding what the sling will be used for. To be certain that the appropriate sling is selected to meet the specific requirements of an individual, many more factors need to be considered in the process. Some of these have already been addressed in a guide intended to simplify the process of sling selection (Chiltern Invadex, 2000). Other key elements that contribute to this important activity are discussed here.

Information about the Client

Knowledge of **basic physical features**, such as weight, build and / or weight distribution will be required in order to select the correct size of sling, as well as one with an appropriate working load.

The **abilities and limitations** of the client will also need to be understood. These may be considered in terms of **motor, sensory, cognitive and psychosocial elements**. Such factors will have an impact on the client's ability to assist with the original selection of the sling as well as subsequent sling fitting and transfers. Important **motor** elements to identify include aspects such as physical strength; muscle tone; postural control; dexterity; rigidity of movement; fixed joints or contractures; sudden unpredictable movements. **Sensory** components would encompass factors such as the client's capacity to feel and /or tolerate pain or discomfort and the general condition of their skin. Balance and co-ordination will also be an issue, together vision, hearing, respiration and circulation. **Cognitive** aspects to be aware of are the client's ability to comprehend and follow instructions as well as their capacity to remember. **Psychosocial** components include factors such as the ability of the client to communicate and co-operate; behavioural features; fear or anxiety and a willingness or reluctance to be hoisted.

A more detailed understanding of the client's **clinical condition, its course and progress** may also be necessary to ensure that any sling that is used does not create additional problems for the client. For example, an individual with reduced muscle tone may experience further difficulties if a sling fails to provide them with

a sufficient level of support. Particular care must be taken if a client's conditions fluctuates or has episodes of exacerbation or remission, because the client's support needs may vary considerably on different occasions. If the client's condition is likely to deteriorate, it may be necessary to provide more than one type of sling, including a sling with a high level of support to accommodate any expected decline in abilities.

Individual clients may have **specific requirements and needs** that have to be accommodated in the selection of the sling. For example, the client may need to use the toilet frequently, so a sling that facilitates toileting and/or clothing removal may be of great importance. Similarly, a sling that safely and comfortably facilitates bathing may be a requirement. Comfort may be an especially important factor for some clients, especially those with sensitive skin or experiencing pain. Clients who are catheterised, or attached to drips or other medical equipment will require a sling that does not restrict tubing, wires etc. Clients with open sores or wounds will need a sling that is comfortable, as well as easily laundered and free from the risk of contamination.

Other factors concerning the client that may influence sling selection will include issues such as previous experience of being hoisted, personal preference and, sometimes, cultural issues. The sling should provide dignity to the client and some clients or situations may dictate that the process of being hoisted is also discrete.

In some instances, it may be possible to consider using the same sling for more than one client. However, care must be taken to ensure that all the clients who will use the one sling share similar features and needs, and that no client could be placed at any risk by sharing a sling.

Information about the Carer(s) or Handler(s)

It is also important to consider the carer(s) or handler(s) when selecting a sling for a client, especially if the client is very dependent and unable them self to help with applying the sling. In this instance the **abilities and limitations** of the individual(s) who will be fitting the sling together with their **experience** and **training** regarding the use and application of slings are most important. Such factors may have a large influence on the choice of sling. For example, a carer who is familiar with using slings may be more adept at fitting them.

The **number of carers available to fit the sling** should also be identified. Depending upon the client, some slings may be easy to apply if two carers are available, but very difficult for a single carer to manage on their own. A carer is more likely to use a sling with which they feel confident, than one that appears too complicated. The **total number of carers involved in a client's care** may also need to be considered in the choice of sling. A range of carers may have a range of abilities, and a need for simplicity and routine in fitting the sling may

suggest a need for a particular type of sling to be supplied, to be certain that the hoisting experience is acceptable to the client and carried out consistently.

Information about the Task(s) to be Undertaken

The **task(s)** for which the sling is to be used must be identified as part of the selection process, as well as the **frequency** with which it will be carried out. Tasks may be considered in terms of the **transfer** that is to be undertaken and the **functional requirements** of the sling. Particular tasks may suggest the need for a specific sling. For example, a sling that is to be primarily used for **toileting** will require an aperture that facilitates access for toileting and personal hygiene. A sling that will be used for **swimming pool transfers** may need to be applied in the water, as well as provide sufficient support whilst being used for hoisting; such a sling will also need to drain and dry quickly. **Hoisting from the floor** will require a sling that offers the necessary support to the client as well as having attachment straps that are long enough to reach the carry bar of the hoist, especially if a mobile hoist is to be used.

Information about Other Equipment

A fourth factor to consider in the selection of a sling is the other equipment with which the sling will be used. The sling's **compatibility** with other equipment must be ascertained. Clearly **the hoist** and the **hoisting system** are key elements. Compatibility of hoists and slings has been debated elsewhere (Hall, 2001) and the selection of hoists will be discussed in detail in a future article, but some examples of other equipment will be considered here.

It is likely that the **task(s)** undertaken will provide an indication of any other equipment that will be used. Transfers between different types of **seating** will require a sling that can be fitted and removed whilst the client is in a seated position. If it is necessary to transfer a client in a **reclined** or **lying position**, perhaps from the floor to a **bed** or **trolley**, then it will be necessary to be able to fit the sling whilst the individual is lying down. This may prove difficult if the surface is high, wide or adjacent to a wall, as it may not be possible to position the sling correctly.

If a sling is to be used for toileting, then the sling will need to have a **commode aperture** of adequate dimensions. It will be necessary to consider the sling in conjunction with the **toilet, commode** or **shower chair seat** that will be used, to ensure the aperture sizes are compatible. Similarly, a sling which is used to transfer a child to a piece of **play** or **therapy** equipment will need to work effectively with it, and not hinder access or use.

Conclusion

It can be seen from this discussion that the process of identifying the correct sling for the individual, the task and, in some instances the carer, requires the practitioner, or specifier of the sling, to obtain considerable information. It follows that whoever undertakes this role may need specific knowledge and expertise concerning the client, the hoisting situation and the range of slings that are available. Selection, provision and use of suitable and safe moving and handling equipment that is fit for purpose is a requirement of legislation, as is the use of appropriate techniques and the maintenance of equipment (Health and Safety Executive, 1992; 1998a; 1998b).

By addressing all of these areas thoroughly, the practitioner will go a long way to ensuring that the best sling is identified and used. It should always be remembered that the use of a suitable sling, of the correct size and properly fitted will make a significant contribution to the experience of being hoisted, ensuring that the procedure is acceptable, effective and dignified for both sling user and handler.

END

References

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