

Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards 2020-2022

CASE STUDY



Preventing musculoskeletal disorders in a large hospital through staff involvement and an age-sensitive approach



ORGANISATION/COMPANY

University Hospital Vienna
(*Universitätsklinikum AKH Wien*)

COUNTRY

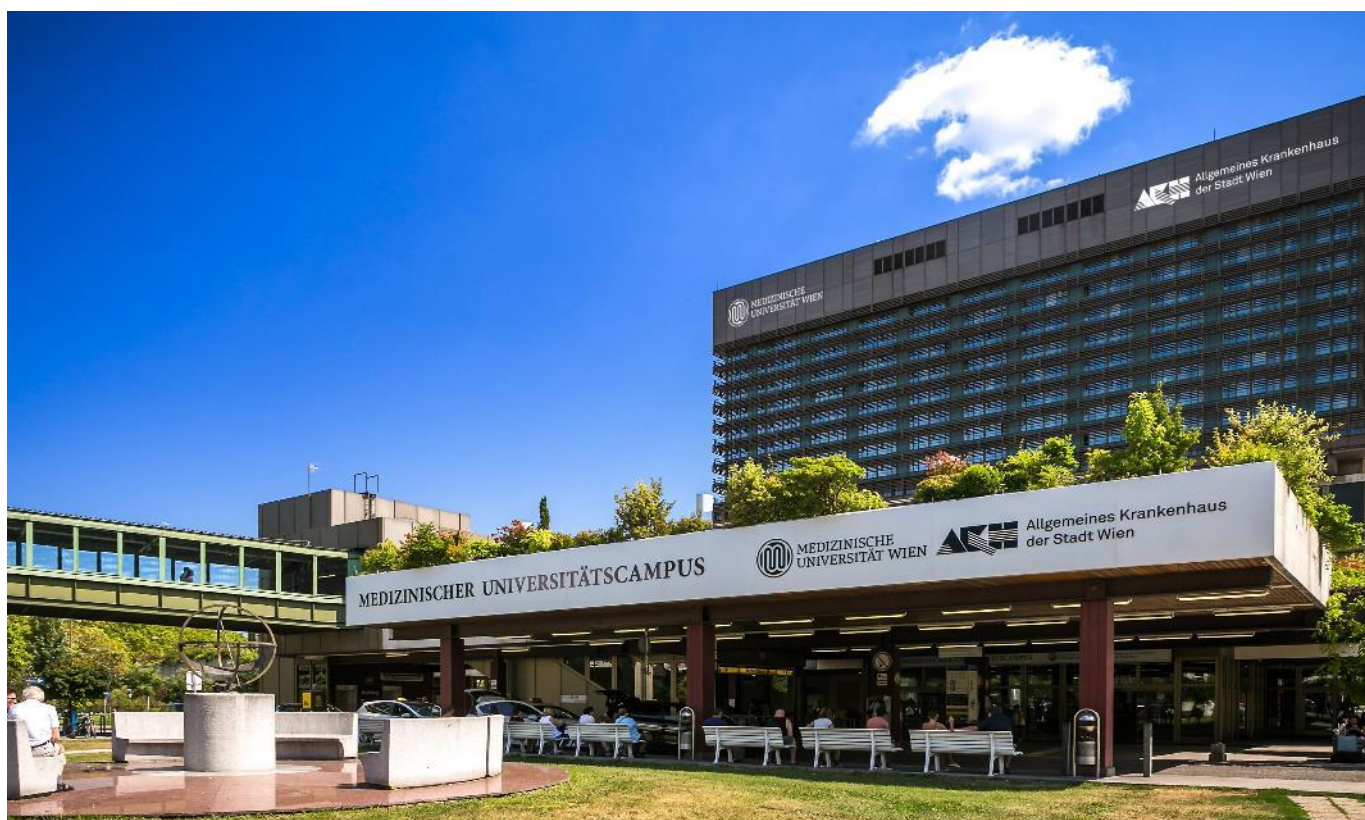
Austria

SECTOR

Healthcare (in-patient support services)

TASKS

Lifting, handling and transportation of patient, cleaning services and other patient support services



Source: AKH Wien

Background

University Hospital Vienna is the largest hospital in Austria. Boasting a workplace full of diversity, the hospital employs around 7,000 workers from a wide range of occupations.

The staff of the Operational Department perform crucial support tasks, such as transporting patients, providing in-patient services and hygienic cleansing of the premises. Despite their essential role in supporting the core functions of the hospital, these employees have often been underrepresented and overlooked.

The Operational Department comprises some 600 employees whose average age is 50 years old. Their work is physically strenuous and involves twisting movements, pushing and carrying heavy loads, as well as walking long distances. Therefore, the key intervention objectives were to promote equipment that reduces physical strain and for long-time, competent staff to be able to share their valuable experience with new recruits.

Aims

With the help of staff, the intervention creates a work environment designed to be compatible with an ageing workforce, taking into account employees' needs and abilities in different stages of their lives. The aim is to preserve and promote a safe work environment in which ageing staff are able to maintain their ability to work.

What was done and how?

- A survey was carried out on the 'social capital' among Operational Department staff so as to involve them in the decision-making process.
- Health circles and risk management workshops were created to obtain feedback from staff regarding their working conditions, to identify musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) risk factors and to propose preventive measures. Based on feedback from health circles, courses and seminars were held between June and December 2021. Topics included spinal and relaxation exercises, back strengthening, smoking cessation, healthy eating with practical cooking sessions, stretching and stress management.
- There are plans to involve staff in the selection of new work equipment through practical testing (back-friendly operation, weight, ease of handling).
- Specially trained health advisors within the department are readily available to provide peer-to-peer advice. They also organised sporting events to encourage staff to exercise during their leisure time.
- Specially manufactured patient transfer chairs with smaller wheels for better manoeuvrability and smoother running were procured. In addition, the height of the handles allowed for a more erect, and thus back-friendly, posture.
- Staff were involved in the selection of safety footwear.
- Mixed-generation cleaning teams were established so younger and older and new and experienced staff could work together and assist each other. Experienced staff provided training to new recruits, while younger colleagues assisted them in more strenuous tasks. For the most physically demanding work tasks, additional male staff provided assistance, thereby sharing

workloads and ensuring optimal use of individual resources.

What was achieved?



Source: AKH Wien

- Employees' self-confidence increased as the intervention emphasised the importance of support staff in hospital operations. The mentoring role of older employees also increased their self-confidence.
- Action was taken to prevent MSDs among workers who perform strenuous tasks.
- Team spirit was created through intergenerational cooperation, giving employees a sense of solidarity and ensuring they perform age-appropriate work. This ensured ageing employees are able to work.

Success factors

- Developing measures through management support and staff involvement.
- Involving staff from diverse interest groups ensured that information was communicated promptly and transparently.
- Easy access to the measures, as well as the establishment of a project group to monitor and evaluate the implementation of measures, also contributed to the project's success.



Source: AKH Wien

Transferability

The entire approach could be suitably adapted by hospitals in other Member States. Certain measures are transferable to other fields, such as the active involvement and participation of workers and the establishment of mixed-generation work teams.

Costs and benefits

Project resources included time devoted by workers and managers to organise and participate in working groups and workshops. Costs incurred involved the procurement of equipment such as ambulatory armchairs and safety footwear. Long-term benefits include preserving staff fitness for work and fewer costs arising from staff absences.

Key features of good practice example

- Through a multifactorial approach, the intervention addresses both physical and psychosocial MSD risk factors in an often-underrepresented group of hospital support workers, taking into account its age diversity.
- Age was addressed not only through ergonomic measures and health promotion but also by establishing mixed-generation work teams to

balance the physical workload and have experienced staff mentor new recruits.

- Participation was important as workers were involved in assessing risks and identifying solutions through workshops.
- The intervention combined prevention with health promotion. The intervention provided easy access to trained health advisors and arranged seminars on healthy eating and exercise.
- A wide variety of prevention measures were used, from introducing ergonomically designed patient transfer chairs to providing orthopaedic footwear.

Further information

Further information can be found at <https://www.akhwien.at>

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