

Safe-patient-handling program creates zero injuries at prison

By **DEBORAH A. MILES**

Times are changing, and that is especially true in the nursing profession. Not long ago, nurses topped the list for work-related injuries from lifting and moving patients.

In New York, PEF played a powerful role in teaching members the importance of safe patient handling and reducing injury by inviting nurses and other health care professionals to conferences.

Members of PEF's Occupational Health and Safety Department spearheaded facility-based committees, and guided members on how to acquire grant money to pay for lifting equipment.

One success story can be found at the Mohawk Correctional Facility's Walsh Regional Medical Unit, located inside the Rome prison.

PEF member Patricia Henderson, the nurse administrator at Walsh, said before safe-patient-handling equipment was installed and utilized, the number of injuries sustained from lifting averaged three per year.

"Since we initiated the program, we have had zero injuries related to patient handling with the use of the equipment," Henderson said. "Our staff really bought into this. Our committee members are the eyes and ears on each unit."

Henderson, along with other PEF members at Mohawk CF, attended a conference on safe patient handling in 2009, and were inspired to get actively involved in developing a program at their own medical unit. She and the others learned more in 2010 at another conference in Florida.

"Walsh was the pilot for the program, and the committee developed a policy that went into effect in 2011. It's a wonderful program, and there is grant money to pay for the equipment," she said.

The Walsh Medical Unit cares for 112 patients who require long-term care. The lifting equipment has proved to be invaluable, especially for lifting or transporting patients who are quadriplegics, paraplegics, and brain-injured or who have suffered strokes and have mobility problems.

"When we first received some of the equipment, we thought the patients might be apprehensive. But it turned out we received positive feedback from them.

"As health care providers, we need to be proactive and take care of ourselves



EASY DOES IT — Patricia Henderson, Janice Logan and Connie Osterhoudt take a moment for a photo to illustrate the bariatric hoist used at the Walsh Regional Medical Unit at the Mohawk Correctional Facility.

— Photo by Judi Antonsen

and our health needs," Henderson said. "It's wonderful to have advantages and opportunities available to make this possible. Safe patient handling benefits us, and our patients. And having the equipment today may make a difference in the predicted nursing shortage. Maybe more people will join our profession knowing they have less chance of being injured."