As a moving and handling adviser and nurse, I’m committed to improving patient experience and safety during moving and handling tasks. To comply with the Health and Safety Executive’s manual handling regulations, a nurse must minimise identified risks to patients, so I set out to simplify and improve slide sheet use for the benefit of patients and staff.

Whether in the patient’s home, care homes or on the ward, moving and repositioning is an important task that affects patients and staff. There are many slide sheets available, with 267 in the NHS supply chain. Staff at our trust said the type, number and size required, as well as the positioning and way they are used, can be confusing.

This was confirmed in a survey by the trust, which showed that staff often did not choose the appropriate slide sheet size and number, or position them correctly for specific repositioning tasks.

**One size fits all**

In response, we first reduced our ordering choice to three sizes of tubular slide sheet, but there was still confusion and user error. Some staff said they wished there was one size and one placement for all repositioning tasks.

We know from research that there is a gap between training and practice reality, and if a piece of equipment is difficult to use or access, people won’t bother to use it.

The problem had been on my mind, and for a long time I kept trying to find a one-size-fits-all solution. I cut up some slide sheets to try to work out how we could do it, at first without success, but with perseverance, the prototype emerged. And when it did, it seemed almost too simple to be true.

So the Versal slide was born. It simplifies use, aids compliance and reduces user error. It also reduces confusion by replacing all of the other slide sheets; one slide sheet, one size and one placement, no matter what the repositioning task.

The slide is bed-sized, partially tubular to enable lateral transfer and turning, and has small splits in the seams of each corner to give freedom of movement to shift patients up the bed.

Reducing the risk of getting it wrong has real benefits for patients – it reduces skin damage and delays, the patient is more comfortable and the process is dignified. It saves embarrassment because a bariatric patient does not need a different slide sheet.

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A slide sheet created and developed by a moving and handling nurse is protecting patients and nursing staff

By Diane Hindson

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The slide sheet design seemed ‘too simple to be true’, says Ms Hindson
It is a much better moving and handling experience.
For staff there is no confusion over which slide sheet to use for the task, or which to order, which in turn allows more time to care.

Following successful trials, 5,000 Versal slide sheets were delivered to the trust early this year. It is now used across the trust’s five community and acute hospitals.

With just one slide sheet to master, we found training more efficient and focused. Link staff offer support between wards.

Importantly, correct handling reduces the risk of musculoskeletal injuries to staff, which can be debilitating and end many careers. An estimated 40% of staff sickness absence is due to injuries, at a cost of £400 million to the NHS. The most common cause of sickness absence is moving and handling injury.

Around 3,600 nurses retire every year due to back injury.

How I turned my idea into the Versal slide:

» Using my idea, I put together a prototype.
» Then I worked with the moving and handling team to test the prototype.
» Sought peer feedback from moving and handling advisers, including those at other trusts, and from members of the National Back Exchange.
» Sought feedback from trust patient handlers.
» Submitted the idea to NHS Innovations North, which supports trusts to implement innovation.
» Worked with the trust’s business development team, including those responsible for procurement.
» Presented the idea to a moving and handling equipment manufacturer.
» Formulated survey questionnaires.
» Carried out audits on ‘traditional’ slide sheets.
» Organised and evaluated new slide trials on wards.
» Was part of the project team that implemented the product at the trust.

We need to retain experienced staff, and we know staff well-being affects patient care. Also, lower sickness absence means reduced need for agency staff, thereby saving money.

Patient-specific
To meet high infection control standards, Versal slides are disposable and used for one patient only. During an audit, I was shocked to see how often slide sheets slipped out of boxes. To minimise this, the sheets are individually packaged and have loops so they can be hung by the bedside.

Though it is difficult to prove that reduction in musculoskeletal injury is down to one factor, as it is often cumulative, results from testing by the trust’s back care team and University of Loughborough professor Mike Fray show the forces required to use the Versal slide are significantly lower, compared with erroneous slide sheet methods. Professor Fray described the Versal slide as an effective ergonomic solution to a problem.

Likewise, it is difficult to know if a sore is due to transfer or pressure, but a pressure-mapping system loaned to the back care department identified increased pressure during poor moving and handling practice. The slide sheet has endorsements from patients, porters, nursing staff and consultants. Change is often not received well, and I was ready for challenges, but staff raised a problem, and we listened and took action.

The Versal has been used at the trust since February, and evaluations have just begun. Early indications show that staff find it simpler and more effective. We have also been approached by our community staff, who are interested in the Versal because it is suitable for use on double beds.

Rewards
A company based in York bought the intellectual property rights to the slide from the trust and patented it, and it is now available on the NHS supply chain.

But the real reward is knowing that it helps protect patients’ skin integrity, and ensures their comfort and dignity during repositioning, as well as protecting the health of carers and staff.

One patient told me they had been in hospital many times, and it was the most comfortable they had ever felt while being moved. That was like winning the lottery.

Diane Hindson is a back care adviser at County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust. She was highly commended in the Innovations in Your Specialty category at the RCNi Nurse Awards 2016.

To enter the RCNi Nurse Awards 2017, go to rcni.com/nurse-awards