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Perioperative Nurses College
New Zealand Nurses Organisation
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Perioperative Nurses College of the New Zealand Nurses Organisation endorses a 7kg surgical instrument crate weight limit

In response to growing concern from theatre nurse members about the increasing weight of surgical instrument sets, the Perioperative Nurses College (PNC) was asked to recommend a safe maximum surgical instrument crate weight.

A working party was established from within the Canterbury-West Coast PNC membership. The working party reviewed the literature, examined benchmarking and collated local objective and subjective data across four hospitals. The findings showed there are very heavy instrument sets (10-14.9Kg) in daily use in NZ surgical settings. The current Accident Compensation Corporation Claim Form has a work description category which describes 'often lifting of 5kg plus as medium work' and 'often lifting of 9kg plus as heavy work'.

Data collated suggests around a third of surgical crates (particularly orthopaedics and neurology) currently weigh more than the recommended 7kg. Given that they are not a 'one off' lift or transfer, and nearly always involve a twisting movement, this poses serious health risks for perioperative nurses around injury and energy levels. When the working party conducted blind lifting trials, perioperative nurses reported 7kg as a comfortable maximum crate weight.

A 7kg surgical crate weight limit is benchmarked with Australia's weight limit for instrument crates. In addition, the New Zealand Sterile Services Association fully endorse PNC's 7kg crate weight limit and are eager to support regulatory controls that reduce the potential risks of injury to their members.

Implementing a 7kg surgical crate weight limit will require commitment across health and safety regulators, PHARMAC, trade industries, health care managers, workplace occupational health leaders and from the personnel that lift surgical crates. PNC recommends that industry and workplaces think big and work small, by forming working groups to prioritise over-weight surgical sets. A gradual move, set by problem set, month by month, is recommended to phase in a 7kg crate weight limit across NZ surgical settings by the end of 2016.

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Surgical crate weight 7kg limit was endorsed by the New Zealand Nurses Organisation Board of Directors, February 2014