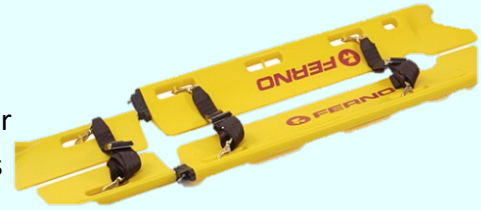
What is a Paramedic? Series: Moving Patients

How do paramedics move patients who cannot walk themselves? Let's look at what equipment a paramedic uses. What equipment may or not be used is determined by the paramedic.
Paramedics will always assess the patient's ability to walk. Patients who can walk on their own or with assistance will be assisted to the stretcher or the ambulance.

AMBULANCE STRETCHER

A stretcher is used for those who cannot sit due to their injuries or illness. Manual stretchers weigh roughly 90 pounds, the powered stretchers weigh roughly 125 pounds – they're heavy! Stretchers are also very long, 6 feet long, and bulky.
Stretchers are designed to be used on hard flat surfaces. Unfortunately, this is not always the environment a paramedic may find themselves in. Uneven terrain, inclines, grass, mud, snow and ice all prove to be challenges for effectively moving a stretcher safely.
Stretchers are not meant to be brought into houses, carried up or down stairs, or areas where there is limited space. The patient is brought to the stretcher by other means, such as walking, or with the use of one of the other devices described below.

SCOOP STRETCHER



A scoop stretcher is a device for carrying a patient who cannot stand or sit up by themselves, for example unconscious patients or trauma patients. The scoop stretcher can be split vertically into two parts allowing the paramedics to slide each half under the patient.
This limits the movement of a patient and can be used in situations where there is limited space. Scoop stretchers reduce movement of injured areas during transfer of a trauma patient, as they allow the patient to remain lying down during transfer to a stretcher. Once on the stretcher the scoop stretcher can be removed from under the patient.

STAIR CHAIR

A specialized chair with handles and wheels. It is used to transport patients in a seated position through narrow halls or up and down stairs. Stair chairs are used in multilevel buildings and homes, but also airplanes, and any location that could require moving a patient in a confined space.
Stair chairs have drastically improved the safety of both patients and paramedics as it allows a safe means of moving patients down stairs.

SPINEBOARDS and SIMILAR DEVICES

A spine board was designed to provide rigid support during movement of a person with suspected spinal injuries. There is no evidence that backboards immobilize the spine, nor do they improve the person's outcomes. Additionally, cervical spine motion restriction has been shown to increase mortality in people with penetrating trauma and can cause pain, agitation, respiratory compromise and can lead to the development of bedsores.
Paramedics in Saskatchewan stopped the routine use of spinal boards over a decade ago.

OTHER LIFTING and MOVING DEVICES

LIFT SHEETS

A lift sheet is of smaller design and allows the patient to remain in a semi-seated position. Lift sheets are typically utilized when patients are in areas that prevent the use of rigid devices like scoop stretchers. Their flexible “hammock-like” nature allow for a more comfortable transition for patients as well as the adaptability required for unique situations for paramedic usage.

TRANSFER BELTS

A transfer belt is made of a durable webbed nylon and a plastic snap buckle. It is adjustable to multiple lengths to accommodate varying patient sizes. This device is designed to help guide the patient through an assisted transfer or transition.