Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Using bed rails safely and effectively in hospitals - adults

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Using Bedrails Safely and Effectively in Hospitals – Adults

Patient Information

Patient Safety

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Introduction

Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust want its patients to stay safe throughout their stay while in our hospitals. The information within this leaflet has been taken from the advice provided by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to ensure bedrails are used safely and effectively in hospitals and at home.

Bedrails are equipment that attach to both sides of the bed/trolley to help you stay safe while you are in bed or on a trolley. The pictures below are examples of the type of bed/trolley and bedrail you may see while you are in hospital.

Bedrails attached to beds can be very effective when used with the right bed, in the right way and for the right person, and will reduce the risk of patients' accidentally slipping, sliding, falling or rolling out of bed, and are widely used for this purpose. They are not designed or intended to limit the freedom of patients by preventing them from intentionally leaving their beds neither are they intended to restrain people whose condition makes them prone to erratic, repetitive or violent movement. They are also not suitable for everyone and can introduce other risks.





Aims

Some patients are at risk of falling out of bed. This can be because of their age and/or complex medical needs etc. or because medication has made them drowsy.

Therefore, we need to ensure that each individual patient is risk assessed prior to the use of bed rails or alternative equipment supplied, to reduce the risk associated with bed rails.

National research has found that around one in 200 hospital patients fall out of bed. Most patients who fall receive only small bumps or bruises, but some patients are seriously injured. Rarely, injuries can be fatal.

Risks

The use of bed rails is associated with direct and indirect risks. Here are some examples of when it is safer not to use bedrails:

- For an independent, fully mobile patient, bedrails would get in their way: also if there is a possibility that a patient will try to climb over a bedrail, it is safer not to use them.

- If a patient is likely to be, or becomes, very restless in bed, they can injure their legs on standard bedrails. Very rarely (less than one in 10 million patients admitted to hospital), patients have died after becoming entrapped in their bedrails.

- If a patient becomes distressed, they may shake the bedrails and dislodge them which can increase the risk of entrapment. Poorly fitting bedrails have caused deaths where a person’s neck, chest or limbs have become entrapped in gaps between the bedrail and the bed headboard or mattress, however as mentioned above, it is very rare that patients have died after becoming entrapped.

Benefits

To help lower the risks, a risk assessment must be carried out by a healthcare professional to establish the suitability of bedrails Where possible, this will be completed in consultation with you and the findings will be discussed with you, and your family or carer. However, in the event that the patient is unconscious or lacks capacity, staff will act in the best interests of the patient and will discuss the findings of the assessment with an appropriate member of the family or their carer, at the earliest opportunity.

The Bedrails Assessment will explore your mobility, condition and environment the bedrails are used in, this allows staff to make an informed decision on whether bedrails would be safe and effective to use or unsafe and ineffective. In these circumstances staff will carefully consider the benefits and risks of the use of bed rails before they are used.

Your admitting nurse will discuss the Bedrails Assessment and how they determine whether your bed should be with or without bedrails, and they will discuss the risks of using bedrails which is outlined above.

The Bedrails Assessment will be reviewed and recorded after each significant change in your condition or needs (including your weight and size).

Alternatives to bed rails

- Electric profiling beds, that lower to the floor and electric profiling low beds that lower to a couple of inches from the floor to minimise the risk of fall injuries.

- Fall mats that can be placed beside the bed to reduce the severity of the impact if the bed occupant does fall.

Important Information

- The trained staff member will fit bed rails as per manufacturers guidelines
- You must not alter the position of the bedrails.
- Bedrails should not be used as a grab rail or to restrict your exit from the bed.

Both bedrails should be in a raised position when you are in bed.



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