Health System Risk Management - Guidance

Ask ECRI: Using Restraints on BiPAP Patients

Published 1/31/2024

A member recently asked about the standard of care regarding using restraints on patients on bilevel positive airway pressure (BiPAP).

The use of restraints has the power to humiliate, terrify, injure, or even kill an individual. As a result, they should only be used in the healthcare setting as a last resort. Improper use of restraints can have negative physical and psychological effects on patients, family members, and staff, and can lead to expensive lawsuits and negative publicity. In addition, restraint use is addressed at length by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and restraint and seclusion are among the most common reasons hospitals are cited by CMS. Healthcare organizations must ensure that restraints are used only when necessary and in an appropriate and safe manner; that restrained patients are closely monitored; and that restraints are removed as soon as possible. This topic is covered in detail in Restraints.

Although no official guidelines specifically address this topic, the use of restraints for patients on BiPAP is highly discouraged, as stated in this overview from Elsevier Health because it would hinder the patient's ability to remove the mask in the event of respiratory distress, vomiting, or other medical-related reasons. If the patient is unable to remove the mask in these instances, it may have disastrous or even deadly consequences, such as aspiration. Therefore, it is generally recommended that organizations choose options such as patient sitters to monitor patients on BiPAP who may be at risk of injury if left unrestrained.

However, there may be instances in which the use of restraints is warranted. In such cases, the organization must ensure that the patient is under medical supervision, is closely monitored, and has an appropriate level of care at all times, as outlined in this restraint policy from Lee Health, and in this one from the University of Toledo Medical Center. Again, it must be emphasized that restraints in such cases should only be used as a last resort. Organizations may also consider giving the patient a low-dose sedative under close medical observation, depending on the patient's medical situation.

The recommendations contained in Ask ECRI do not constitute legal advice. Facilities should consult legal counsel for specific guidance and develop clinical guidance in consultation with their clinical staff.

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TOPICS AND METADATA

Topics

Behavioral Health; Care Delivery; Culture of Safety; Occupational Health; Quality Assurance/Risk Management; Security/Safety

Roles

Clinical Practitioner; Nurse; Patient Safety Officer; Risk Manager

Information Type

Guidance

Publication History

Published January 31, 2024

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- Restraints

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