

BQC - 90 - 025

Date: April 18, 1990

To: All Wisconsin Nursing Homes
All Long Term Care Staff
All Special Resources Section Staff

From: Larry Tainter, Director
Bureau of Quality Assurance

Subject: Falls from Toilet, Commode or Shower Chair

Recently the Bureau of Quality Compliance has become aware of a number of incidents involving residents who were left unattended while on the toilet, commode or shower chair and subsequently fell. These incidents have often resulted in serious injuries and complications. Since many of these incidents involved the use of restraints, we have reviewed the effectiveness of restraining a resident on a toilet or commode. We have concluded that there is no safe way to use restraints for this purpose. Mr. Ernest Posey from the Posey Company has also indicated to us that they have been unable to determine a safe way to restrain a resident on the toilet. Facility staff should therefore be present while toileting residents, who are not capable of safely toileting themselves, unless the resident chooses privacy.

The resident has the right to privacy in toileting if he or she chooses. The decision about privacy needs to be an informed one, based on an up-to-date assessment by the facility so that the resident is well aware of any potential safety issues if left alone while toileting. In cases where the resident has a guardian, it is the guardian's decision. In cases where the resident appears confused or is unable to understand safety issues, but has not been adjudicated incompetent, family members or significant others should be relied upon to make the decision. In cases where the individual has no legal arrangement for handling his/her affairs, or where family members are not in agreement or has no active family involvement, and the need for guardianship is apparent, guardianship should be sought.

The resident's choice should be clearly documented in the current medical record. If the facility thins records, the statement regarding the resident's choice should be retained in the current data, such as the care plan, which is reviewed on a regular basis. The facility may choose to develop a form to document the assessment of the resident's toileting needs and choice. As a part of reviewing appropriateness and adequacy of care, Bureau staff will be reviewing any documentation which indicates that the resident has been offered the choice of privacy.

Staff should frequently check on residents who choose to have privacy in toileting, but are not capable of safely toileting themselves. Staff should also be in attendance when residents are in shower chairs. Shower chairs, because of their unstable structure, are easily tipped over. Although restraints may be used for safety and positioning, their purpose is not to prevent the chair from tipping over.

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