



Patients' Rights Affirmed

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) have issued new regulations on the use of restraints and seclusion for patients in facilities participating in Medicare and Medicaid programs (<http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/pdf/06-9559.pdf>).

The new regulations require more rigorous and frequent training for staff on use of restraints or seclusion. They also maintain that a patient must be evaluated within 1 hour of restraint or seclusion, but allow trained registered nurses and physician's assistants to conduct the evaluation, as well as physicians and other licensed independent practitioners. However, if a nurse or physician's assistant conducts the evaluation, a physician or licensed independent practitioner must be consulted as soon as possible.

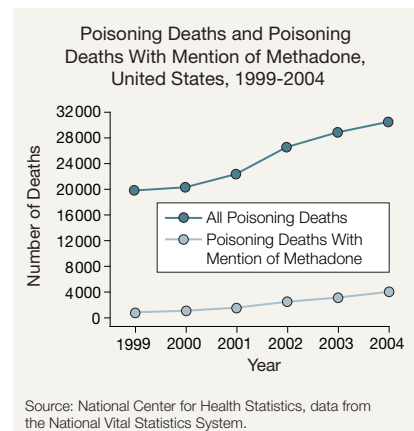
Patients and their families also must be notified of their rights with regard to care, privacy, safety, confidentiality of their records, and freedom from unnecessary restraint and seclusion. Each participating facility must have a grievance process in place and notify patients and families of this at admission.

Methadone Deaths Rise

Methadone-related poisoning deaths are increasing far faster than deaths from other types of poisoning. The annual number of deaths related to methadone poisoning rose 390% between 1999 and 2004, from 786 to 3849. During the same period, the number of all poisoning deaths rose 54% to 30 308.

The trend has continued, with a 6% overall increase in poisoning deaths and a 29% increase in methadone-related deaths between 2003 and 2004 (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hestats/methadone1999-04/methadone1999-04.htm>).

In a consensus report issued in 2004, officials from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration concluded that the increase in methadone-related deaths were most likely related to growing use of the drug as a prescription analgesic rather than as a treatment for opioid addiction.



Methadone-related poisoning deaths are rising at an alarming rate, possibly because of increased use of the drug as an analgesic.

In November 2006, the US Food and Drug Administration issued a public health advisory noting that methadone can depress breathing or cause changes in heart beat after receiving reports of deaths and serious adverse events in pain patients taking the drug.

PTSD Linked to Heart Disease

A study of about 2000 male veterans participating in the Veterans Affairs Normative Aging Study has found that those with symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are more likely to develop coronary heart disease (Kubsansky LD et al. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2007;64:109-116).

The study included only men without preexisting coronary heart disease with follow-up for more than a decade. Symptoms of PTSD levels were measured using the Mississippi Scale for Combat-Related PTSD in 1002 of the

men, and 944 of the men were assessed with the Keane PTSD scale. For each SD increase in symptom level, the men tested using the Mississippi Scale had an age-adjusted relative risk of 1.26 (95% confidence interval, 1.05-1.51) for nonfatal myocardial infarction and fatal coronary heart disease combined and a relative risk of 1.21 (95% confidence interval, 1.05-1.41) for all coronary heart disease outcomes. The results were replicated in the cohort using the Keane scale and were strengthened by controlling for depressive symptoms.

The men studied had relatively low levels of PTSD symptoms suggesting that higher levels of symptoms may pose an even greater cardiovascular risk.

Seniors Mum on Herbs

Although many seniors use alternative therapies such as herbal supplements, few discuss these practices with their physicians, according to a telephone survey of a nationally representative sample of 1559 individuals aged 50 years or older conducted by AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons) and the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (http://www.aarp.org/research/health/prevention/cam_2007.html).

Of the individuals surveyed, 69% of those using alternative therapies did not discuss such use with their physician. This lack of communication is of concern, in part, because some herbal supplements may have adverse effects or dangerous interactions with drugs. For instance, ginkgo biloba (taken to improve mental function) has been linked to spontaneous bleeding and may interact with anticoagulants and antiplatelet agents.

When asked why they did not talk to their physicians about alternative medicine use, 42% said their physicians never asked, 30% said they did not know they should, and 19% said there was not enough time during the visit. —Bridget M. Kuehn