

The Use of Restraints During Acute Mental Health Interventions: A Review

Context

Use of physical restraints to manage the behaviour of psychiatric in-patients is a controversial issue. Physical restraints do not have a known function as a mental health treatment intervention. Instead, they are used as a safety measure to reduce patient self-harm or harm to others.

Technology

Physical restraints refer to any methods of physical force or any mechanical devices used to reduce a patient's freedom of movement or access to his or her own body. Examples of mechanical devices used as restraints include handcuffs, fetters, or straitjackets.

Issue

The potential negative health consequences resulting from the use of restraints — deep venous thrombosis, sudden death, accidental strangulation from vest restraints, brachial plexus injury, and staff injuries — have led to a trend toward reducing the frequency and duration of restraint use in mental health treatment settings. A review of the clinical evidence and guidelines on the use of physical restraints during acute mental health interventions for patients in forensic care or correctional facilities will help inform decisions about restraint use in this population.

Methods

A limited literature search was conducted of key resources, and titles and abstracts of the retrieved publications were reviewed. Full-text publications were evaluated for final article selection according to predetermined selection criteria (population, intervention, comparator, outcomes, and study designs).

Key Message

There was no evidence found to guide decisions on restraint use for psychiatric patients in forensic or correctional facilities.

Results

The literature search identified 399 citations, with 6 additional articles identified from grey literature. Of these, 26 were deemed potentially relevant; however, none of them met the criteria for inclusion in this review.

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