



Use of Lap Belts on wheelchairs June 2011 (Shropshire)

MHRA Medical Device Alert

A Medical Device Alert directive from **Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)**; **Medical Device Alert Ref: MDA/2008/037** was distributed to relevant services including Wheelchair & Posture Service regarding posture/safety belts fitted to seating, stair lifts, hoists and wheelchairs. As a result of this and other issues (including a serious incident that occurred nationally involving the incorrect use of a lap belt) Shropshire Wheelchair and Posture Service do not issue lap belts for wheelchairs as a matter of course. **MDA/2008/037** supplements general guidance available in Medical Device Alert **MDA/2005/002** www.mhra.gov.uk/

Wheelchair Services do supply and fit posture retaining belts and lap belts if appropriate following an assessment of postural need. Neither posture or lap belts are a substitute for seat belts in vehicles. There is **NOT** a total ban on the use of wheelchair lap belts but they must **not** be used as a matter of course.

Use of Lap Belts

If it is deemed necessary for short periods of time for example to ensure the person is safe over bumpy surfaces, this should be an individual decision specific to that persons needs at that time. There may be a health and safety issue such as the person's condition that means they are at risk of injury if they don't use a lap belt. This should be part of the persons care plan, risk assessments should be in place and the situation should be carefully monitored and reviews should be incorporated.

Use of a lap belt in such circumstances would be a restriction rather than a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards issue.

When the service user has capacity they should be involved in the decision about whether the lap belt is used, there should be detailed explanation and consultation with the person etc. If following assessment the service user is deemed to lack capacity to make that specific decision (concerning lap belts) then a best interest decision would need to take into account all relevant factors and this would need to be documented. If the use of a lap belt is deemed necessary and in the person best interests for short periods of time to support the person then it would not be a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards issue.

However, if the use of lap belts is to restrain the service user or to reduce the need to supervise and monitor them this would be deemed inappropriate and would be considered both a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards issue and an Adult Protection issue.....

Risk Assessment

In all cases a Risk Assessment is required and careful monitoring of the person to ensure their safety at all times (see attached article regarding the death of a service user resulting from inappropriate lap belt use).

Care plans should include specific details of the purpose of using the lap belt and arrangements for monitoring and reviewing this. Staff should be very clear about the use of the lap belt for that person and how to ensure the persons safety.

Lap Belt Provision

Providers can order their own lap belt if not already fitted, or Wheelchair Services will provide advice and guidance when there is a specific need demonstrated.

Pensioner strangled to death after being left strapped in wheelchair overnight in care home

By ANDY DOLAN Last updated at 09:19 08 January 2008 (Mail on Line)

Brigid O'Callaghan was discovered in her bedroom with the lap belt of her wheelchair around her neck.

A pensioner was found strangled by her wheelchair's lap belt after staff at her Bupa care home failed to put her to bed for the night, an inquest heard today.

Brigid O'Callaghan, 74, had been admitted for a week's respite care to give her daughter Ann, the widow's full-time carer, a break.

But on her second night she was left in her wheelchair and slipped down the seat, meaning the lap belt became entangled around her neck, the court heard.

A housekeeper discovered the pensioner's body the following morning when she went in to clean her room at the Amberley Court Nursing Home in Edgbaston, Birmingham.

Mrs O'Callaghan - known to friends as Vera - was still wearing her clothes from the previous night, with her panic button out of reach. The widow, whose husband died in 1981, had been in poor health since she was knocked down on a pedestrian crossing in February 2003. The accident left her with serious injuries, including brain damage, incontinence and a fractured pelvis.

She spent 11 months in hospital and when she was finally sent home, the pensioner - a mother of five and grandmother of two - was left in a wheelchair and unable to care for herself. Her daughter moved in to look after her.

In July 2005, Mrs O'Callaghan, from Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, was admitted to Amberley Court for a week to enable her family to take a short holiday. Her stay went well and it was arranged for her to stay for a second week three months later. Her daughter told the jury she had planned to visit her mother two days into this second stay. But that morning, the manager called her to say her mother had died.

Miss O'Callaghan and her uncle went to the home and were met by two policemen outside the pensioner's room. "They said I could not enter," she said. "I was hysterical by then. I was told she had been found in her wheelchair with the strap around her neck. "It became pretty clear that she had not been put to bed at all that night and had been left in her wheelchair."

A member of staff was later arrested and questioned but no charges have been brought. Home Office pathologist Professor Helen Whitwell told the inquest Mrs O'Callaghan died of asphyxia after she was strangled by the strap of the seatbelt. There was no evidence of anyone else being involved.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-506637/Pensioner-strangled-death-left-strapped-wheelchair-overnight-care-home.html#ixzz10L5Y36mL>