

Article: 0656

Topic: EPW20 - e-Poster Walk Session 20: Emergency Psychiatry

Perception During and After Physical Restraint in Psychiatric Patients

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Background: Although discussed controversially, coercive practices during involuntary admission are common in mental health services. The impact of physical restraints on patients has not been sufficiently studied.

Aims: To investigate the subjective perception of patients during and after physical restraint.

Method: 47 patients in a psychiatric intermediate care facility experiencing belt fixation were interviewed and filled out self-assessment forms at 4 visits.

Results: The median duration of restraint was 99 hours. Median VAS scores indicated moderate levels of anxiety. With increasing time span from the fixation, memory regarding this event decreased and patients experienced a regain of self-control. Consistently, 50% perceived high levels of coercion at admission, PTSD could be supposed in 25% of the patients.

Conclusion: Despite a considerable restraint of freedom, distress related to belt-fixation seems acceptable in our sample. Patients' disapproval concerning restraint measures seems to diminish with time, probably related to decreasing memory regarding the fixation practice.