

What's New in the Patient Safety World

October 2022

How Safe Are Wheelchairs?

Here's an issue we haven't even thought about before – how safe are wheelchairs? The Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority has issued a safety alert about wheelchairs ([PPSA Alert 2022](#)). While we all probably recognize that patients may fall when getting into or out of wheelchairs, PPSA found that other injuries can result from wheelchairs being unfolded. These can affect patients, visitors, volunteers, or staff.

The alert describes the injuries as:

- Cuts
- Loss of nails
- Broken bones
- Crushing injuries
- Loss of fingers

In an article accompanying the PPSA alert ([Quesenberry 2022](#)), Molly Quesenberry notes “it is imperative that staff using this equipment, or any other type of equipment, receive education and training on it prior to patient use.” She cautions that, at the time of purchase, it is important to obtain instructions for the produce and users should read the instruction manual before using the wheelchair. While we do this for what we perceive as more complicated pieces of medical equipment, it is just as important we do this for wheelchairs.

She also cautions that folding wheelchairs should not be kept in unsupervised public areas, such as commonly done in hospital entrances. Instead, only non-folding rigid-frame wheelchairs should be kept there.

PPSA has also an excellent 4-minute [YouTube video](#) on “The Hidden Risks of Wheelchair Use”. It notes that some wheelchairs come with tags warning about the risks of these chairs and recommends these tags be kept on the wheelchairs.

References:

Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority. Safety Alert. Wheelchair-Related Harm. 2022
<https://patientsafetyj.com/index.php/patientsaf/article/view/wheelchair-risks/safety-alert>

Quesenberry ML. The Hidden Risk of Wheelchair Use. Patient Safety 2022; 4(3): 6-9
<https://patientsafetyj.com/index.php/patientsaf/article/view/wheelchair-risks>

Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority. The Hidden Risks of Wheelchair Use. YouTube video 2022
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=od1ECM5pWA4>

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