

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 3, 2002

To: All EMS System Participants

From: Mark A. Mitchell, DO, FACOEP
EMS Medical Director
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David Griffen, MD, PhD, FACEP
EMS Medical Director
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Re: Patient Restraint

Patients that require restraint due to combativeness should never be placed in the prone position on the ambulance stretcher. Patients that are restrained in the prone position are susceptible to airway compromise and decreased tidal volume due to diaphragmatic strain. Patients that are restrained should be placed supine on the stretcher or in the left lateral recumbent position.

EMS personnel should only use soft restraints and should check and document frequently, circulation distal to the restraint. Only law enforcement personnel should employ the use of handcuffs, with an officer riding in or closely following the ambulance. This is important should the restraints need to be loosened or removed if the patient condition deteriorates.

Not all combative patients become this way because of drug or alcohol ingestion or mental illness. Many medical conditions such as seizures, hypoxia, hypoglycemia and brain injuries can cause patients to present as combative. Recognition and treatment of these underlying conditions is imperative to proper patient care.

A more comprehensive restraint policy will be forthcoming when our system protocols are updated this summer. Additionally, there is a very good article in the March 2002 edition of JEMS that covers this very topic for those interested in reading more about this subject. Thanks you for your attention to this matter.