



# 5-minute safety talk

## Safety with Agitated Patients

Not all patient encounters go as smoothly as we would like. Some situations can be confrontational and put the clinician, and patient, at risk of injury.

### Be Alert.

An important step in preventing injury to you or your co-workers is to anticipate a problem and be prepared to respond appropriately.

Learn to recognize situations where emotions can be volatile, such as:

- Injuries due to violence
- Individuals on drugs or alcohol
- Death. At times, family members of a victim become distraught and lash out at those who are there to provide assistance.

Patients with mental illness can also be challenging due to paranoid ideas or emotional state. Be sensitive to these situations and reiterate your role as a medical professional to those present.

### Gather Information.

In each of these situations, it is always important to gather as much information as you can regarding the context of the event. This will help you identify the patient's needs, as well as avoid triggers that may worsen the situation. Always address an agitated patient with respect. Use a voice that conveys confidence and concern at the same time. Try to avoid commanding language until you have made an attempt to interact with the patient in a way that conveys you are there to help.

When talking to or assessing an upset person, maintain a reasonable amount of personal space between yourself and the individual. This allows you the opportunity to react if there is danger, and it is less threatening to the patient. Be aware of your

surroundings and have a safe exit from the situation should the patient become further agitated or lash out.

Whenever possible, utilize supporting law enforcement to ensure your own safety and the safety of your crew, though this may agitate a patient in some situations. Remember, in most states, a medical officer or police officer's direction is required to transport a person against his/her will. If the situation evolves to one requiring restraint and transportation, thorough documentation of the situation is critical. Be sure to include the name and position of the person authorizing the restraint.

If an individual requires restraint for medical or safety purposes, a practiced, planned approach can reduce the likelihood of injury to the patient and the providers. It is very important enough people help to ensure a successful outcome of the situation. Assign one person to maintain control of each limb and one to restrain the patient's head to prevent spitting or biting. Once the limbs are controlled, soft restraints should be placed in succession in a very methodical manner.

The patient may need to be medically sedated. This should only be done by an EMS provider. Sedation provides the most safety to personnel — and the patient — when a patient becomes overly agitated, and it has minimal complications.

EMS professionals should also:

- Watch restrained patients closely for signs of problems.
- Remove restraints as soon as the situation allows.
- Thoroughly document the situation and place the documentation with the patient's record.

Rarely, are we called upon to aid a person who is dangerous due to a medical or emotional problem. In those cases, safety is the priority, both for the patient and the provider. Knowing how to approach these scenes can help ensure situations are resolved as safely and effectively as possible.

Visit [nsc.org/members](http://nsc.org/members) for more safety tips

