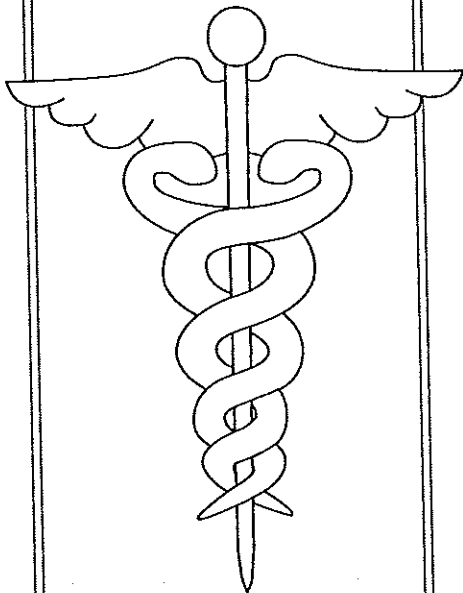


Long Term Care
Network,
A Division of
PRIMEDIA Healthcare

Environmental Safety

EDA 311-0114



LTCNTM
Long Term Care Network

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INTRODUCTION

Nursing assistants are, in many ways, responsible for environmental safety in a long term care community. By being aware of potential fire and accident hazards in the environment and by taking actions to prevent mishaps and injuries, a nursing assistant works to protect the welfare and safety of residents.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After participating in this activity, the learner should be able to:

1. list hazards that exist in the long term care environment.
2. discuss ways of preventing injury in long term care.
3. explain steps to take if an emergency occurs.

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This syllabus is designed to be used in conjunction with video program EDA 311-0114 by the Long Term Care Network, a division of PRIMEDIA Healthcare. PRIMEDIA Healthcare is a division of PRIMEDIA Workplace Learning.

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ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY

Nursing assistants are responsible for maintaining a safe environment for residents in long term care. Be protective of residents and work toward preventing accidents. Be alert to potential hazards and be prepared to take action when necessary to avoid accidents and injuries.

GENERAL HOUSEKEEPING

The elderly are particularly at risk for accidents. Know your facility's policies and keep general safety precautions in mind. There are several general rules for decreasing risk.

Residents with poor vision may fall or trip over objects, so be sure to keep hallways clear of objects. When moving objects or persons, remember that *peripheral*, or side, vision decreases with age.

Prevent injury by keeping sharps, such as razors, knives, and kitchen utensils away from residents. Remind residents who are capable of handling sharps that not all residents can manage them. Enforce your facility's rules for regulating the use of sharps.

Perfumes, shaving lotions, certain plants, and many other substances which may be taken for granted in another setting may be a poisoning threat for a disoriented resident. Another problem may be food that has been forgotten and allowed to spoil.

STANDARD PRECAUTIONS

Standard precautions are measures used by healthcare workers to prevent the spread of infection. A standard precaution is placement of a barrier between a person who is infected and one who is

not. Wear latex gloves and other protective barriers such as gowns and masks when coming into contact with wounds, secretions (mucus, body fluids), or blood. Gloves provide a protective barrier.

CHEMICALS

Keep all chemicals, even common ones, away from residents to prevent accidents. Blurred vision can make it hard for an individual to read labels. Residents with dementia may mistake a chemical for food or drink. Always be aware that poisonings can happen quickly. Label chemicals, keep them in their proper places, and never place them in an unlabeled bottle or container which may cause a person to mistake them for other substances. Keep cleaning materials labeled and out of the way so a resident cannot reach them or mistake them for other substances.

A special chemical hazard is mercury, which is used in thermometers and other equipment. Handle this equipment carefully to prevent breakage and escape of the mercury.

MATERIAL SAFETY DATA SHEET

There should be a hazardous materials information system in place in every facility. All facilities have a listing of chemicals known as the *MSDS* or *Material Safety Data Sheet*. This sheet explains which ingredients are hazardous and how to handle a spill. It details first aid measures for anyone who comes in contact with the chemical. Some chemicals need special spill kits and special disposal procedures.

The MSDS should be available at all times to staff. It is usually kept in a central, easily accessible

location. Make sure you know where it is and how it use it. It is important to keep it up to date.

SMOKING AND SAFETY

Cigarette, cigar, and pipe smoking in a long term care facility cause special safety concerns. Nursing assistants can help prevent fires by ensuring that residents, visitors, and employees follow the facility's smoking policies. Smoking may be allowed in designated areas, but not permitted in other areas for reasons of fire safety.

There are many other precautions nursing assistants can take to prevent fires. For example, make sure that cigar and cigarette butts are put out before emptying ashtrays. Ashtrays should be made of substances that do not burn, such as glass or metal. In addition, ashtrays should be emptied into metal containers partly filled with sand or water. Emptying ashtrays into plastic containers or wastebaskets lined with paper or plastic bags can cause fires.

Supervise smokers who are confused, disoriented, or sedated since they may accidentally ignite their clothing with a lighter, match, or hot ashes. These residents can be provided with a smoking apron, which protects them from burns. Remember to remove smoking materials from the bedside of confused or sedated residents. Some residents are not allowed to keep their own smoking materials. Provide ashtrays to residents who are allowed to smoke, and know which residents are allowed to smoke and/or use tobacco..

SECOND-HAND SMOKE

Passive, or second-hand, smoke is now known to be a danger to both residents and employees in a facility. Facilities that allow smoking generally designate specific areas as smoking and non-smoking, or allow smoking outside only. Nursing assistants can inform residents and visitors where smoking is permitted.

Take special precautions in areas where oxygen is used or stored. Nursing assistants can do the following to prevent fires in places where oxygen is stored or given to residents:

- ❖ Do not allow open flames anywhere near oxygen.
- ❖ Post "NO SMOKING, OXYGEN IN USE" signs on a resident's door and bedside.
- ❖ Check with the charge nurse before using electrical equipment in areas where oxygen is used.
- ❖ Do not use alcohol, nail polish remover, or paint thinner in areas where oxygen is used.
- ❖ Secure oxygen cylinders with chains to prevent them from falling.

ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

After smoking, misuse of electricity is the second most common cause of fires. Nursing assistants can help prevent electrical fires by:

- ❖ checking electrical appliances for frayed cords, loose connections, or defective plugs before each use.
- ❖ using extension cords safely. Never place extension cords under rugs or drapes.

Frayed cords and overloaded electrical outlets can cause fires. Turn off electrical appliances before unplugging. Sparks that cause fires can occur when electrical equipment is unplugged before being turned off. All equipment should have plugs with three prongs instead of two. Have malfunctioning electrical items sent for repair. Make certain plugs fit properly in outlets and wires are not exposed. Do not place any electrical appliance where it can fall into the sink, bath, or shower, and do not use electrical appliances around water.

Another electrical danger is lightning. Keep residents inside and away from windows during electrical storms since wind can blow objects through windows during a storm.

POWER OUTAGE

Power outages affect suction machines, respirators, and other machines which are necessary to sustain life. Healthcare facilities have special generators which supply electricity until the outage is corrected. Separate lines run to the emergency generator. Usually, these lines have different col-

ored plugs. Turn off all unnecessary electrical appliances during an outage.

Know how to turn off piped-in gas or oxygen containers during an emergency. If this is not the responsibility of nursing assistants, it is important to know who is responsible and how to notify him or her if needed.

OUTSIDE THE FACILITY

Residents with dementia may wander away from the facility and become lost. Some facilities equip residents with alarms to alert staff when a resident leaves the building. Residents who wander must be carefully supervised to prevent accidents. When residents leave the facility with family members, make certain the family understands special care and precautions to take to ensure safety.

RESTRAINTS

Know your facility's policies and procedures for using restraints. Have a plan and rehearse releasing residents in restraints in case of fire or other emergencies. Learn to use restraints correctly—any restraint applied incorrectly can cause strangulation or other injuries. Secure straps snugly, but not tightly.

Ensure good body alignment before restraints are applied. Apply restraints securely enough to provide necessary protection while allowing for necessary freedom.

To protect the resident from injury, pad skin and bony prominences from the restraint. Apply restraints securely enough to protect the resident, but allow some slack so movement of the part is possible.

If a restraint is applied to the chest, ensure the resident can breathe easily. If wrist or ankle restraints are applied, check circulation every 15 minutes. A pulse beat at the site below the restraint indicates adequate circulation.

Using a bow tie knot to tie restraints enables a nursing assistant to untie the restraint quickly in an

emergency. When applying bed restraints, tie the restraint to the elevating portion of the bed frame instead of the side rails to prevent injuries. A final safety measure is to ensure that a signal light is always within a resident's reach.

DISASTER PLANNING

In the case of a civil disturbance or a natural disaster, nursing assistants must protect residents from danger. In some cases, residents may be transported elsewhere while others are treated at the facility. Make use of training and information gained through drills to know procedures to be followed in any emergency.

Disasters include such emergencies as bomb threats, civil disturbances, looting, gunfire, plane crashes, or explosions, and environmental disasters such as earthquakes, tornadoes, and floods. Nursing assistants must follow plans for protecting residents and staff. Know the protocols to follow in your facility in cases of emergency.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLAN

Most facilities have a specific emergency preparedness plan. Part of the plan is the protocol for notifying physicians and administrators. Plans for transporting residents and notifying fire and police departments of problems are detailed. Take drills seriously and learn as much as possible from them. Lives may depend on the staff's response to a disaster.

FIRE SAFETY

Read and follow the facility's plan for fire safety. Know where the facility's escape routes and fire extinguishers are located and how to use them. Being prepared for a fire or disaster is important because a disaster can occur at any time. During a fire, nursing assistants are responsible for the safety of residents.

The following tips prepare nursing assistants for action if a fire occurs:

- ❖ Know the floor plan of the long term care facility.
- ❖ Be aware of exit routes.
- ❖ Know the location of fire alarms and fire extinguishers.
- ❖ Know how to report a fire.
- ❖ Know the long term care facility's emergency plan.

"RACE"

When a fire starts, act immediately. Following the steps of the word "RACE" can avoid confusion or delay in an emergency. "RACE" stands for the following:

- ❖ Rescue
- ❖ Alert
- ❖ Confine
- ❖ Extinguish

SUMMARY

There are many dangers in institutional living, particularly for the elderly. Nursing assistants play an important role in ensuring the safety of residents. Be aware of situations which may arise and know what to do if faced with an emergency. Remember your responsibilities, and prepare yourself to handle emergencies calmly.

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POST TEST

ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY

1. The safety of the resident is part of the nursing assistant's responsibilities.
 - a. True
 - b. False

2. It is not necessary for a nursing assistant to know emergency plans for an institution since nurses will tell them what to do at the time.
 - a. True
 - b. False

3. Smoking is a safety hazard.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. All electrical plugs and cords should be checked before each use.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. Keeping residents in restraints always ensures their safety.
 - a. True
 - b. False

