Environmental Restraint

It is apparent that routine locking of exit doors is occurring in some health and disability care facilities which are not designated 'locked units'.

The impact of locking devices on doors is restriction of a consumer's normal freedom of movement. This practice constitutes 'environmental restraint'.

Restraint must not be used as a routine measure. It is a serious intervention of last resort requiring robust clinical justification and oversight. All restraint use is subject to Part 2 of the Restraint Minimisation and Safe Practice Standards therefore in facilities other than those designated as a 'locked unit', whenever the use of locking devices on doors restricts a consumer's normal freedom of movement, the service provider must satisfy the requirements of the Standards. These requirements include the service provider demonstrating that:

(a) the use of restraint adheres to the principles of least restrictive practice and the rights, safety and dignity of the consumer are upheld
(b) there are clear organisational responsibilities and clinical justification for the use of restraint
(c) there are documented individual consumer restraint minimisation and safe practice assessments and evaluations including the clinical rationale for restraint use and the impact of restraint use
(d) the use of locking devices on doors does not restrict the normal freedom of movement of consumers for whom restraint is not intended
(e) they comply with fire and safety standards
(f) if the use of environmental restraint is not effective in maintaining the safety of the consumer or meeting the needs of the consumer then alternative management strategies will be investigated and utilised
(g) there are provisions to ensure the needs of consumers are re-assessed when clinically indicated, through an external assessment process, to determine the most appropriate level of care required.

Locked units

The following information is provided in the foreword of NZS 8134.2:2008:

‘In a “locked unit” the locked exit is a permanent aspect of service delivery to meet the safety needs of consumers who have been assessed as needing that level of containment. Although by definition the locking of exits constitutes environmental restraint the requirements of this Standard are not intended to apply to the locking of exits in ‘locked units’, where the unit:

(a) is clearly designated a “locked unit”;
(b) has clear service entry criteria against which consumers are assessed prior to entry;
(c) can ensure consumers using the service continue to meet the service criteria following entry; and
(d) can ensure any consumer that does not meet the service criteria has the means to independently exit the unit at any time.
Therefore when all of (a) – (d) are met, the practice of locking exit doors in “locked units” is not covered by this Standard. However, in the absence of any of the above points, the locking of exit doors should be treated as environmental restraint.

The following statement is provided by the P 8134 workshop committee:

The ‘locked units’ clause contained in the foreword of NZS 8134.2:2008 was intended to relate specifically to contracted services, such as those providing dementia level residential care, where locked exit doors are an accepted and permanent aspect of service delivery and where consumers are independently and comprehensively assessed prior to entry.

The practice of controlling exit doors in a ‘locked unit’ was deemed exempt from the requirements of the Restraint Minimisation and Safe Practice Standards as in these units there is no requirement to:

- minimise the practice of locking exit doors as this is a permanent aspect of service delivery
- demonstrate an approval process for the practice of locking exit doors as this is an accepted aspect of service delivery
- undertake individual consumer restraint minimisation and safe practice assessment and evaluation, in relation to the practice of locking exit doors, as prior to entry consumers are considered to have been independently and comprehensively assessed as requiring this level of containment.

Environmental restraint

The following information is provided in the foreword of NZS 8134.2:2008:

‘Where a service provider intentionally restricts a consumer’s normal access to their environment, for example, where a consumer’s normal access to their environment is intentionally restricted by locking devices on doors or by having their normal means of independent mobility (such as wheelchair) denied.’

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