

Public Citizen: Bed handles dangerous for elderly

They are suppose to help elderly or sick patients maneuver in and out of bed, but the consumer advocacy group Public Citizen says some bed rail handles can be dangerous and have caused several deaths. The group says the handles can trap a patient causing strangulation or suffocation.

In a petition sent to the Food and Drug Administration Wednesday, Public Citizen urged the agency to order Bed Handles, Inc. to immediately recall Bedside Assistant bed handles, to ban marketing of the product and to investigate other bed handles manufactured by other companies to see if they pose a similar risk.

"Contrary to the manufacturer's claim that the Bedside Assistant bed handles make any bed a safer bed, data previously provided to the FDA demonstrate that these devices can turn a bed into a death trap for patients who are physically weak or have physical or mental impairments," said Dr. Michael Carome, deputy director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group.

The petition is asking for an immediate ban of model numbers BA10W and BA10W-6. The handles are generally used in homes and nursing facilities but not intended for hospital use according to the manufacturer.

Public Citizen claims the handles can slip out of place causing a gap between the mattress and the device that a patient can slip into. "Public Citizen's review of FDA records found that since 1999, four patients have died after getting trapped by Bedside Assistant bed handles. In three of these cases, it appears as though the patients were strangled or suffocated. In a fifth life-threatening incident, the bed rails trapped a hospital patient. Public Citizen believes that the number of people killed or injured by bed handles is higher; these incidents generally aren't reported because people don't realize bed handles are medical devices overseen by the FDA," Public Citizen said in a statement.

According to the Bed Handles, Inc. website, Bedside Assistant handles help patients sit, stand, rise and roll over and are "table in all directions and can be firmly pulled, pushed, lifted and leaned on." Company president Bon Shaw is aware of 3 incidents involving the handles but says the information in Public Citizen's petition is incomplete, inaccurate and somewhat misleading.

"After we became aware that there was a second injury with our product, we added buckles and straps to all of our models of bed handles to ensure that when they were placed on the bed they were securely affixed to the bed," Shaw said. "Our concern was that not as much that the product can slip in use but that it was not being installed correctly and in either case our straps and buckles are engineered to hold the product securely against the mattress. These straps have been and are given free to all dealers, to all customers and have been for the past 2 years."

Shaw says there have been no reported problems since the addition of the buckles and straps and believes the problem has been eliminated.

FDA spokeswoman Erica Jefferson told CNN "FDA will review the petition from Public Citizen and respond directly to the organization."

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