

Keeping podiatry chairs safe



Not all podiatry claims are directly related to treatment; Guild Insurance regularly receives claims for injuries arising from podiatry chairs. No one sets out to have someone injured in their care. When it happens it can be distressing for you and your client. People come to you for help; they don't expect to be injured. If they have a bad experience, they may never return to your practice and are likely to tell others of their misfortune.

The following cases highlight how easily incidents can happen.

Case 1

A man fell from a podiatry chair when he bent forward to remove a shoe. At the time the chair was raised to its maximum height, altering the centre of gravity.

The chair tipped and the man fell from a height of approximately one metre, landing on his left shoulder. He suffered a fracture and as a result, could not work for an extended period.

Case 2

An elderly woman attempted to move off the chair as the podiatrist was lowering it down. She stumbled and fell, sustaining a laceration to her ankle. Due to a long history of diabetes and peripheral vascular disease, the wound took many months to improve.

Case 3

A client fell to the ground when the back rest of the chair suddenly gave way without warning. The man landed on his head, suffering bruising and serious lacerations.

Reducing the risk of injuries

Working with clients

- > Don't assume clients will act safely on or around the chair, it's not uncommon for clients to behave in a way you wouldn't expect.
- > Ensure the chair is positioned at the lowest setting before clients enter the room.
- > If you leave the room, instruct them not to attempt to sit on the treatment chair, or the podiatrist's stool, until you return. Have a conventional chair available.

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- > Supervise people getting onto and off the chair. Instruct them not to attempt to reach out or get off the chair without your help.
- > Consider how a client's size and weight may impact the stability of the chair, particularly when the chair height is raised.
- > Don't let children play on, or under, the chair.
- > Consider the benefits of using signage to further alert clients to the dangers of not following safety instructions.
- > Ensure all staff have been educated about the risks of using podiatry chairs and how to use them safely.

Maintaining or purchasing treatment chairs

- > Reduce clutter in and around the treatment area. Keep equipment or other objects away from the chair's foot switch to avoid accidentally activating the pedal.
- > Think about the age and suitability of your current chair(s). Is it suitable for safely treating obese or elderly clients?
- > Anchor the chair to the floor if possible.
- > Adhere to the manufacturer's instructions. Obtain another copy of the manual if the original has been misplaced.
- > Regularly clean and service the chair according to the manufacturer's guidelines.

- > When purchasing a new chair, consider the:

- > maximum weight it can safely accommodate
- > degree of stability the chair maintains as the height is raised, or if weight is transferred to the foot plate
- > ease with which arm rests can be retracted to help clients safely get on and off the chair
- > infection control risks and the ease with which it can be cleaned
- > importance of securely anchoring the chair to the floor
- > other safety considerations relevant to your practice.



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