Patient Information on Using Bedrails Safely in Hospital Settings

How bedrails are used
Bedrails are attached to the sides of beds to reduce the risk of patients rolling, slipping, sliding or falling out of bed. They cannot be used to stop patients getting out of bed, even if they might be at risk of falling when they walk.

The benefits
Some patients fall out of bed because their illness affects their balance, or their treatment makes them very drowsy. Some patients need special air-filled mattresses to reduce the risk of pressure sores, which can be easier to roll off accidentally. Some patients have electric beds with controls they use to move from lying down to sitting up. These beds can be very comfortable, but some patients are at risk of falling when they use the controls to change their position. Most patients who fall out of bed receive only small bumps or bruises, but some patients are seriously injured. Bedrails can prevent such accidents.

The risks
Some illnesses can make patients so confused that they might try to climb over a bedrail and injure themselves. If there is a possibility that a patient will try to climb over a bedrail, it is safer not to use them. If patients are independent, bedrails would get in their way. If patients are very restless in bed, they can knock their legs on a bedrail or get their legs stuck between the bars. Padded covers and special soft bedrails can reduce this risk. In NHS Lothian, all bedrails have been checked to reduce the small risk of patients getting trapped between the bed and the bedrail.

Who decides when to use bedrails
If patients are well enough, they can decide. If they are too ill or lack the capacity to decide for themselves and the matter is urgent, staff will decide. If possible discussion will take place with relatives and carers before a decision is reached. Bedrails are used if the benefits are greater than the risks.

Alternatives to bedrails
There are many ways to reduce the risk of patients falling and staff can discuss these with you. If you have any questions about bedrails or preventing falls, please ask the staff.