



# VITALS

A Weekly Safety Newsletter For Medical Transport Professionals

Mike Szczygiel (Segal)  
888-969-8033  
meszczygiel@thomcoins.com

## Complications Of Dialysis

Everybody who transports a dialysis patient needs to be aware of how fragile they are. Even if you are providing only transportation services and do not perform clinical interventions you need to be acutely aware of the impact of dialysis on your client. This is particularly important if you transport the same clients several times a week for a long time. You must not be lulled into a false sense of security. When we describe dialysis, we're referring to hemodialysis. The other two renal replacement therapies are peritoneal dialysis and renal transplant. Renal replacement therapies are used when the kidneys have lost their ability to remove waste products from the blood.

Dialysis patients in the United States are different from dialysis patients in other countries. The US government funds treatment for End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD), which gives the US a large dialysis population. It is estimated that in 2005, almost half a million people in the US were being treated for ESRD. Chronic Renal Failure (CRF) happens before ESRD, but the presentation and treatment of the two don't differ significantly. Both are treated with dialysis. Dialysis is rationed in other countries. US patients receiving it are sicker and older than those in other countries.

### What are some things about dialysis patients that make moving them especially dangerous?

- They are at risk of sudden death if their potassium level gets too high. This can happen if they miss dialysis, eat too much of the wrong foods or become acidotic.
- Elevations in magnesium and decrease in calcium can keep their muscles and nerves from working properly.
- Anemia can make them tired, reduce their exercise capacity and decrease the effectiveness of their reasoning.
- Blood pressure can drop and they can become weak or faint if they are moved from one position to another too quickly.
- Dialysis disequilibrium syndrome is a fancy name for a common complication seen in dialysis patients. The patient is weak, dizzy, may have a headache, and may have mental status changes in severe cases.
- Dialysis patients on chronic anti-coagulation are at high risk for bleeding. This bleeding may occur as the result of events that would have no effect on somebody not receiving anti-coagulants.



CRF and ESRD should be thought of as full body diseases, not just problems with the kidneys. For example, dialysis patients have a cardiovascular mortality that is 10-to 20 times higher than the general population. So, we should always remember that our dialysis clients are quite ill and impaired even when they have no acute or new complaints.

We must make certain that they are adequately secured using the appropriate restraint mechanisms. Safe, smooth driving is mandatory. The jolt from a sudden braking maneuver can be enough to cause an intracranial bleed. The dialysis client has a severely limited ability to keep from falling. We are their fall protection device.

Sponsored By:  **THOMCO**