



State of New Jersey

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TO: CEOs and Patient Safety Liaisons for New Jersey Hospitals  
Interested Parties

FROM: Mary C. Noble, M.D., M.P.H. *mcn*  
Clinical Director, Patient Safety Reporting System

RE: Unstageable Pressure Ulcers

DATE: September 7, 2010

The European Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel (EPUAP) and the National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel (NPUAP) collaborated on International Guidelines for the *Treatment of Pressure Ulcers*, which was published in 2009. The International NPUAP/EPUAP Pressure Ulcer Classification System provides the following description for an Unstageable Pressure Ulcer:

**Unstageable/Unclassified: Full thickness skin or tissue loss – depth unknown**

Full thickness tissue loss in which actual depth of the ulcer is completely obscured by slough (yellow, tan, grey, green or brown) and/or eschar (tan, brown or black) in the wound bed. Until enough slough and/or eschar are removed to expose the base of the wound, the true depth cannot be determined; but it will be either a category/Stage III or IV.

The Patient Safety Reporting System (PSRS) has accepted unstageable pressure ulcers as serious preventable adverse events since the program began in 2005. The Department of Health and Senior Services has been requested to provide clarification regarding the Patient Safety Regulations and required reporting of unstageable pressure ulcers.

The current Patient Safety regulations were reviewed and guidance was provided by staff within the Division of Health Facilities Evaluation and Licensing. The current regulations require that Stage III and Stage IV pressure ulcers be reported to the PSRS; however, the regulations do not provide for the required reporting of unstageable pressure ulcers.

The PSRS works collaboratively with healthcare facilities to improve patient safety and prevent/decrease serious adverse events. The PSRS strongly encourages facilities to voluntarily report unstageable pressure ulcers, as they represent full thickness tissue injury, similar to Stage III and IV pressure ulcers. This will provide additional opportunities for the PSRS to work with hospitals to improve patient safety, while providing confidentiality protections under the Patient Safety Act.