WHOLE BODY CRYOTHERAPY

By: James Orlando, Senior Legislative Attorney
Brandon Seguro, Research Staff Assistant

ISSUE
Provide an overview of whole body cryotherapy (WBC).

SUMMARY
WBC involves sitting or standing in a chamber that is cooled, using electricity or liquid nitrogen, to temperatures ranging from minus 200 to minus 300 degrees Fahrenheit for two to four minutes. Proponents of WBC claim that it has a wide range of health benefits, including (1) reducing stress, inflammation, and muscle and joint pain and (2) improving mental focus, insomnia, rheumatism, and various skin conditions. But the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently released a consumer update warning that WBC is a trend that lacks evidence and poses potential health risks, including frostbite, burns, and eye injuries from the extreme temperatures and asphyxiation when liquid nitrogen is used for cooling.

The lack of specific regulation of WBC chambers nationwide caught national attention after a 24-year-old spa worker in Nevada, Chelsea Ake-Salvacion, was found dead in a cryotherapy chamber on October 20, 2015. Ake-Salvacion died of asphyxiation due to an oxygen-poor environment caused by the chamber's liquid nitrogen cooling system.
GUIDELINES FROM NEVADA'S DIVISION OF PUBLIC AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

In response to Ake-Salvacion's death, Nevada's Division of Public and Behavioral Health issued a press release, on November 20, 2015, outlining the division's recommendations for the safe use of cryogenic chamber therapy. The guidelines state, among other things:

1. cryogenic chambers should not be used by minors under age 18;
2. the client must be above the level of gas/fog produced by the machine (typically over five feet);
3. the facility must meet all Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements and operate with current liability and workers' compensation coverage;
4. a client should not be allowed to use the cryogenic chamber for more than three minutes a session and one session per day as a general standard;
5. any person considering using a cryogenic chamber should consult his or her medical provider prior to use;
6. employees operating the machine must receive comprehensive training on how the machine operates, how to identify an issue with the machine, how to maintain and clean the machine, what to do if the machine is malfunctioning, and employee and client safety;
7. the facility should provide a waiver to clients that clearly outlines what the procedure can provide, the risks of using the machine, the safety instructions, and contraindications; and
8. there should be signage that notes the machine is not a medical device and should be used at the risk of the client.

FDA CONSUMER UPDATE

On July 5, 2016, FDA released a consumer update warning that WBC is a trend that lacks evidence and poses potential health risks. The report states that FDA "does not have evidence that WBC effectively treats diseases or conditions like Alzheimer's, fibromyalgia, migraines, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, stress, anxiety or chronic pain." It also states that no WBC devices have been cleared or approved by FDA. FDA warns that potential hazards of WBC include frostbite, burns, and eye injuries from the extreme temperatures and asphyxiation when liquid nitrogen is used for cooling. Asphyxiation could occur when nitrogen vapors lower the amount of oxygen in the room, resulting in oxygen deficiency and loss of consciousness.

JO/BS:bs