

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

Clinical Tip: Beware: Pulse Oximetry Can Provide a Misleading Snapshot of O2 Status

An ED nurse expert explains why.

Using pulse oximetry to assess a person's oxygenation is "good for trending but not for making a one-time assessment," advises consultant and ED nurse **Shelley Cohen, RN, MSN, CEN**, principal of Health Resources Unlimited in Howenwald, Tenn.

All that pulse oximetry will tell you "is the oxygen permeability in the hemoglobin cells in the tip of the finger," Cohen tells Long-Term Care Survey Alert. And most geriatric patients have some degree of peripheral vascular disease, she points out. Thus, "if the person is walking and talking and not using accessory muscles to breathe, and the pulse oximetry shows the O2 is really low," the machine isn't giving you a correct reflection of the person's ventilation status.