Background
In the Netherlands it is no longer allowed to use freedom restricting measures such as fixation of patients in bed. However, risk of falls, mental and physical restlessness in bed are common problems in patients with Huntington’s Disease (HD). The occupational therapists of Atlant Care Group are, together with the nursing staff, looking for safe alternatives.

A “ball blanket” seems to be a good alternative for maintaining the safety of HD patients. This blanket is filled with plastic balls and/or polystyrene granules (Figure 1). It stimulates the sensoric system and improves physical wellness in HD patients. The weight of the balls provides pressure on the pressure points of the body allowing different senses to be stimulated, such as stimulation of the sense of touch, muscles and joints. This stimulation has a suppressive and regulatory effect on impulses to the central nerve centre which increases body awareness.

Case History
We offered the ball blanket to 7 HD patients (4 males; mean age 51 years [range: 33-66]) with nocturnal restlessness due to physical and mental limitations. These limitations were: difficulty to relax, severe chorea, increased muscle tone and increased alertness, frequently getting out of bed and problems with staying asleep.

All HD patients experienced a benefit of the ball blanket. They felt safe and more relaxed (Figure 2). The chorea decreased and breathing became calmer and deeper. Due to the ball blanket, patients became drowsy which made it easier for them to fall asleep for a few hours or even the whole night.

The nursing staff is also very positive using the ball blanket. One nurse indicated: “It is so good to see that our HD clients are comfortable and relaxed by the sense of security the ball blanket offers. It is remarkable to see the results, …. almost immediately, …. even before I am leaving the apartment”

Conclusions
Considering our experiences, the ball blanket is likely to be of benefit for HD patients. The blanket may have a positive effect on quality of life. However, further research is needed to establish whether the blanket is beneficial for all HD patients.

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