



Thinking about ...improving practice

No. 4: Continence Care

A common problem?

Many residents, perhaps a majority of those you look after, have some difficulty getting to and using the toilet. One of the most common complaints made about care homes from those who visit – professionals and families – concerns unpleasant smells. These smells may arise from ‘accidents’ and the steps taken to deal with them. In some cases an ‘accident’ may be a direct result of the time taken to respond to requests for help.

Dignity denied

While not all occasions when residents soil or wet themselves can or should be attributed to poor practice or abusive behaviour on the part of care staff, there is no denying that many such events could be avoided.

Being wet or dirty - or both - and perhaps uncomfortable and sore, as a result of failing to attract attention is not something that most of us can recall experiencing. Such situations generally stopped applying to us in our pre-school days when we were very young children, though we may have had more recent bouts of severe ill health making us temporarily dependent on others for help in getting to the toilet. None of us wants to go back to those days – either permanently due to losing control of our bodily functions, or intermittently because the people looking after us are too busy to help, or to see that we need help.

Priority for action

There are some simple rules that we should all consider adopting:

- A request for assistance to use the toilet should generally be seen as needing an immediate or early response
- Telling someone to wait should not be seen as a reasonable response
- Telling someone to wait because they are wearing an incontinence pad is no more dignified than to ask the same of someone wearing standard underwear

- Leaving someone in wet or soiled clothing or pad is unacceptable and should not be tolerated
- Discussing the problem, and any avoiding action that could have been taken by either carer or cared for should happen in private

Obstacles to making this happen

In busy homes hard-pressed staff constantly have to balance residents' demands with lots of other residents needing help with aspects of their health or care, frequently at the same time.

If we accept that some of the reasons for poor performance on this front may be as a result of too few staff, with too many tasks to do, looking after many heavily dependent residents this needs to be discussed within the staff group.

Managers need to review their policies and procedures so that staff can focus on improving their practice.

Sources of help

Homes are obliged to get professional advice on the promotion of continence in the home. Specialist help may be available from a Continence Adviser, located either in the local PCT or at the district general hospital.

Incontact, which incorporates the Continence Foundation, produces information and publications addressing issues associated with bowel and bladder problems likely to be of interest and assistance to care home staff
www.incontact.org

Think small, think personal – make a difference.

Contact us

The Relatives and Residents Association,
24 The Ivories, 6 –18 Northampton Street,
London N1 2HY
Tel 020 7359 8148

info@relres.org

www.relres.org

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