



Butterflies in the Nursing Home

Incontinence: Change Your Culture – Change Your Brief

Butterflies go through a process of change or transformation known as metamorphosis. It is through this process that this insect is able to change its appearance becoming the beautiful butterfly we ultimately see and enjoy.

Since the federal Nursing Home Reform Law's enactment in 1987 emphasizing dignity, choice, and self-determination in the care for its residents, we are seeing the culture changing within our nursing homes today. This culture change, like the metamorphosis of the butterfly, is bringing about beautiful new changes or transformations in our nursing homes.

We are seeing a change from the old institutional nursing home setting to ones with a more home-like, resident-centered living module. . . . Despite these positive changes, one key area that has not caught up to this cultural revolution is the area of incontinence care.



Much like the butterfly going through its changes, we are seeing a change from the old institutional nursing home setting to ones with a more home-like, resident-centered living module. The change is about respecting residents, promoting dignity and individualized care. This new philosophy is shown to help residents function at their highest practicable physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being. Step-by-step, in little ways and big, we're delivering better care, and granting more autonomy and confidence to our residents.

I am seeing beautiful dining rooms with tables set with china and elegant flatware. Residents come to dinner as if they were going out to a fancy restaurant. Residents today have a choice to eat in the facility's dining area or if they prefer have "room service" deliver their food to their own private rooms. Today's culture is about making choices based on personal preferences, tastes, likes and dislikes – not a "one-size-fits-all" approach so commonly used in our industry.

Despite these positive changes, one key area that has not caught up to this cultural revolution is in the area of incontinence care. Attitudes still pervade the industry that reflect, "This is the way we've always done it" with regard to product choices, application of those products, staff and resident education and empathy to those residents afflicted with incontinence. Unfortunately, the "one size fits all" mentality still exists in many

nursing homes when it comes to this important health and quality of life issue.

That is not to say nursing home staffs are not well intentioned. They want to do the right thing. They have compassion and pride in doing a great job for our loved ones whom they care for day and night. What is lacking is keeping up with new education and products with regard to "culture change" in incontinence care. Continence management is a vital area that is deficient in practice and should be incorporated into the wave of culture change today.

All too often we see residents dress for an elegant dinner, but worry how they will maintain their dignity if they happen to suffer the effects of incontinence. How will they be kept dry while they dine? How will they maintain their comfort while having to wear an incontinence product without it showing or being detected by their friends? Unfortunately these are the questions that keep residents from leaving their rooms in fear of the indignity of incontinence.

When it comes to changing an adult brief on a resident while in the bed, most nursing homes still employ an old time bed-making technique that is out-dated and impractical. But there are newer application techniques available that nursing leadership can find by talking with their incontinence supply vendor.

By combining better products with educational tools and resources, you will foster a **culture of change** that is designed with each individual's needs in mind.



Similarly, many adult brief products are still made with a “one size fits all” strategy, which makes it very difficult to maintain a high level of dignity for the resident. Poor fitting products do not promote a high degree of confidence, comfort, and continence management. Ill-fitting products are also uncomfortable and do not keep the resident’s skin dry, which can lead to skin breakdown, wet beds, and increased risk for pressure ulcers. Clearly, “one size does not fit all” when it comes to adult incontinent products.

But incontinent products, like resident care techniques and education, are improving. Innovative brief manufacturers are utilizing enhanced technology along with a sharper focus on proper fit and comfort, to design products that work and feel better for the resident. When a resident is properly fitted with an incontinent brief, they will naturally feel a sense of well-being, dignity, and confidence.

By combining better products with educational tools and resources, you will foster a culture of change that is designed with each individual's needs in mind. Moreover, these programs and products will inspire your staff to embrace individualized continence management care, which will lead to enhanced levels of satisfaction for both staff and residents.

When administrators and directors of nursing are asked what types of continence management programs or systems are in place, I am usually told, “We don’t really have a system,” or

“We want to implement a system, but I’m too busy right now.” Continence management is far too important of an area to be ignored anymore.

In addition, with the recent change to MDS 3.0, facilities are missing the connection that bridges the MDS 3.0 / Section H in implementing an effective individualized continence care program. Often times the facility MDS coordinator is not in coordination with a continence management team in the facility. Not only is this a missed opportunity for improved reimbursement for the facility, but it is also a missed opportunity to bring culture change in this area as well.

Culture change with regard to continence management in the nursing home environment is evolving slowly but its time has come. While many facilities are concentrating on physical changes to their building, they must now consider what types of changes will impact something so intimately related to individual residents themselves as continence management.

A culture change in continence management in your nursing home will allow your resident to truly participate in life to the fullest inwardly while experiencing your beautifully changing nursing homes outwardly.

Debra J Birchman, RN.BS.WCC, is a Clinical Services Manager for the Personal Care Division at Medline Industries, Inc.

Printed with permission from Advance for Long-Term Care Management.