

# What Makes Infection Control in Nursing Homes Unique?

In past years Infection Control in nursing homes had little, if any emphasis, but fortunately it is now quite different due to the greatly improved standard of care. This improvement in care has arisen out of the regular inspections of the homes by the Commonwealth Standard Monitoring Teams as well as the need to keep up our bed occupancy. I, as an Educator and Infection Control Practitioner have found, that although the infection control principles remain unchanged, the way that they are implemented is different from that of the acute hospital setting.

## The Aged Person

A high percentage of aged people suffer from chronic illnesses and are usually discharged from hospital earlier than either the younger person or an aged person still living in the community. Many of them also have a disease e.g. Parkinsons Disease or Diabetes, or are mentally impaired. This along with the ageing process in which the body's capacity to function efficiently reduces their resistance to infection and response to treatment. The areas of change that reduce the resistance to infection that we need to be aware of are:

**Poor Appetites** that have resulted from reduced taste sensation or having poorly fitting dentures due to shrunken gums.

**Reduced Lung Function** from the soft tissues becoming more rigid which results in poor gas exchange.

**Poor Bladder Function** resulting in a high level of incontinence.

**Dementia** which reduces cerebral capacity and ability.

These changes all at some time are predisposing factors to infections in the elderly resident who frequently suffers from respiratory tract infections, urinary tract infections or slow wound healing that could result in wound infection.

Good basic nursing practice is the most important preventative measure. This involves ensuring that the elderly resident receives adequate nutrition by providing a diet that is tasty, easily eaten and digested. The elderly need

to be encouraged to have plenty of fluids to keep the bladder free of irritation thus reducing the level of urinary tract infections and incontinence. It is also very important to maintain a high level of hygiene especially for the incontinent resident and the resident with dementia.

## Interaction of Residents

Much of the life in nursing homes revolve around group activities such as eating together in dining rooms, concerts, craftwork, bingo and other group games. The residents also mix freely together and often spend time in other residents' rooms. If the resident with dementia is mobile they are known to wander and this can create many difficulties with infection control, especially as we like to provide a homely atmosphere for the residents. Once again it is essential to ensure that good hygiene habits, especially the hand washing of the dementia resident is maintained.

## Lack of Education

In past years Infection Control played only a minor part in nursing home care, but now due to the increased recognition by the Proprietors of nursing homes to meet the Outcome Standards (the measure for monitoring the performance of nursing homes) of which infection control plays a major part, this has changed. Infection Control, Quality

Assurance and Occupational Health and Safety programmes now play a major role in nursing home care.

## Available Resources

I have found one of the most beneficial supports to me is networking with others. I have not felt isolated as I have found various resources readily available.

## The Local Hospitals

These all have Infection Control Practitioners who have been able to advise and help me when needed.

## The Infection Control Association

At the meetings each month opportunity is given to share any problems related to infection control issues in the work place. This has not only benefited me but has also helped the hospital practitioners understand nursing home needs more. I have also found this time of great benefit to keep abreast of the current changes in acute care hospitals.

## Standards for Practice

This manual, which is available from the Infection Control Association has been of great benefit. It has proved a very good basis on which to prepare policies and procedures.

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