BEDSORES:
A PREVENTABLE DISASTER

Bedsores, pressure sores, or decubitus ulcers — called by any name, they are a medical disaster which in most cases can be prevented. According to a New York Times article by Jane Brody, over one million Americans develop bedsores in any given year. This number is, in all likelihood, a low estimate because there are no reliable estimates of incidence outside of hospitals. Whatever the actual number of bedsores, the amount of human pain, suffering, and death they cause is not only beyond measurement, but merits all the preventative attention we can focus on this healthcare issue.

The principals of prevention are understandable once the causes of pressure sores are recognized. Although we don’t often think about it, we are all aware that the body can withstand a certain amount of pressure. For instance, we are all surrounded by atmospheric pressure. Or when we sit down, the sofa exerts pressure on our back, legs, and buttocks. When sitting for some length of time, an able bodied person feels undue pressure developing and shifts positions accordingly. However, a person who is physically impaired might not get the necessary feedback from their body, thus they don’t adjust positions and the pressure persists unrelieved.

This unrelieved pressure stops the body fluids from reaching those cells affected and they die, resulting in skin breakdown, or sores. Untreated, the sore becomes an ulcer. Infection often sets in and tissue erodes, eventually reaching and infecting the bone. This life threatening condition is estimated to cause over 60,000 deaths per year.

Many physical problems cause patients to be at high risk for developing pressure sores. People in this category are those in a coma or traction, or immobilized due to a stroke or spinal cord injury. Also, diseases which affect circulation, like diabetes, can increase the risk of tissue breakdown. And of course, INCONTINENCE increases the risk, especially in the elderly confined to bed. In old age, the skin is more susceptible to injury, and heals more slowly. Urine, which contains uric acid, contributes to skin irritation and breakdown. Keeping the skin clean, and dry (although pliable and naturally moisturized) is a must.

Other preventative measures include shifting body positions frequently. Many experts advise that bedridden patients and people in wheelchairs be shifted every two hours if they are resting on a surface which permits this. Otherwise, some experts advise a change of position every fifteen to thirty minutes. Special cushions and mattresses are available, as are an array of elbow and heel protectors. These items help to protect against the friction which can potentially be caused when the patient is moved across a bed.

If you or a family member fall into the high risk category, take some preventative action. If the patient is institutionalized, ask the appropriate care giver what their successful preventative procedures are, and then see that they are followed in your own case. If you feel more could be done, talk to your doctor or nurse. A good resource is an ET. An ET is a nurse who has specialized in enterostomal therapy and is familiar with good skin care.

If the patient is being cared for at home, remember to follow the principles of good skin care, frequent position changes, and good nutrition to keep the tissues healthy and less susceptible to easy damage.

Further reference materials can be obtained by the professional care giver. Send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: The Center for Tissue Trauma Research and Education, 408 N.E. Alice

(Continued on page 3)

COPING WITH THE EMOTIONAL STRESS OF INCONTINENCE

Editor’s note: the following is an excerpt from the chapter “Strategies for a Full Life” by Ronald H. Rozenesky, Ph.D. and Steven M. Tovian, Ph.D. from Managing Incontinence: A Guide to Living with the Loss of Bladder Control.

If helplessness is the precursor to depression, then hopelessness is the invitation to the incontinent person to stay home. If shame is the lock on the door, then control is the key.

The way out is to change. To change is to gain control over your response to the world around you. To feel in control, to be in control, to focus on ways to create that sense of control you are looking for is to gain mastery over those social, emotional, and personal restrictions that, until now, you have felt imprisoned you. To have a repertoire, a list of options to cope with the problems of incontinence, will provide you a sense of freedom, a sense of preparedness to cope with your own feelings and those of others.

THOUGHT STOPPING:

Thought stopping can help you overcome the nagging worry and doubt that stand in the way of relaxation. Repetitive and intrusive trains of thought, or obsessions, are often unrealistic, unproductive, and anxiety-provoking. Obsessions may take the form of self-doubt: “Because of my incontinence, I’ll never go back to work.” Obsessions may also take the form of fear: “I wonder if I’ll have an accident in public tonight at the party.”

Thought stopping involves concentrating on the unwanted thoughts and, after a brief time, suddenly stopping and
ONE VOICE:
An Editorial
“One of the greatest diseases is to be nobody to anyone.” Mother Teresa

Often, people with incontinence stop many of their usual daily activities because they fear having an accident in public. This withdrawal leads to isolation and depression. Two thieves of the joy of living. These thieves can effectively be fought by becoming busy again. One way to be busy is to “give yourself away.”

Volunteerism is one of the unique ways that ordinary people help make America strong. Volunteerism also makes individuals strong. Helping others can change one’s perspective on life because it directs focus away from one’s own problems. How we perceive and think about the world around us determines our behavior and the quality of our life. A broadened perspective can help the helper of others.

If you’ve been feeling alone and unneeded, consider volunteering to help someone else. A recent article in McCall’s Magazine points out that there are over 37 million Americans with handicaps. In fact, this group is our largest minority. Many voluntary service agencies have been organized around these physical problems and most of them can use your help.

You can call the American Cancer Society and drive patients to their treatments. Meals-on-Wheels programs need volunteers to deliver meals to shut-ins in many communities. Or, the local Easter Seal Clinic could use your offer to answer their busy telephones. True, as a volunteer you can still run the risk of an incontinence accident in public. However, you would be working around others whose body has failed them. You should find much interest in your incontinence. I bet they’d be much more interested in the time and help you are so cheerfully providing.

If you aren’t able or ready to venture forth, maybe calling some of your local clergy would help you identify a person in your community who is blind and would appreciate tapes you could make for them. Or, perhaps right in your own neighborhood there is a frightened child who must stay alone after school each night while their parents work. Whatever you have to give, there is someone who would welcome it gladly.

As the calendar pages turn to 1988, join in. Turn over a new page in your life. Volunteer — do your part to help make America strong.
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I would like to correspond with others with incontinence problems. It took me a very long time to tell my wife and doctor about my problem, since I did, life is not all that bad. I would very much like to find some rubber pants. All that I can find available seems to be plastic which I do not care for. If you care to use my letter and name in the Informer please do. Maybe someone out there knows of a supplier of rubber pants and will correspond the information to me.

James Wicks
7304 Fielding
Detroit, MI 48228

Dear Editor:

Please publish my name and address so that your readers can provide me with the following information. Of course I will respond to those who write.

First, several family members, including myself and teenage daughters, have nocturnal enuresis, i.e., we wet our beds. We have tried all sorts of cures and nothing has helped. I would like to correspond with others who have had, or still have, this problem. Maybe we can help each other. Also, I would like to know where I can purchase form-fitted, vinyl-coated cloth waterproof mattress covers. I will answer all letters.

Carol Hines
P.O. Box 24331
Richmond, VA 23224

Dear Carol:

Thanks for writing. We are pleased to see that more and more people wish to exchange information. Let us know what you learn that could be helpful to others.

Dear Informer:

Finally, after many years I will be traveling abroad. However, I'd prefer not to pack my bags with incontinence undergarments. Will I be able to buy them in Europe, and if so where do I shop for them?

Worried.

Dear Worried:

A member who recently returned from abroad told us he was only able to find pad and pants systems in England. In France, he was able to find an adult brief, but at prices higher than in the states. In Italy he was able to find both varieties. We need help from more of our readers here, since our information is skimpy. Those of you who travel, please drop us a line naming the cities where you visited and if and where you found incontinence products. We'd be delighted to keep a file.

Dear People:

The main reason I am writing is in regard to a letter from "M.F. in Connecticut" whose problems are compounded by overweight. I do think there must be many of your readers who suffer fromweight problems, and you could perform a real service to them by suggesting they try the program set forth by Overeaters Anonymous. This is a program with no dues and no fees, set up along the lines of Alcoholics Anonymous and has been a great help to many people. He or she could write the OA Headquarters, Box 92870, Torrance, CA 90603 for literature and more information about local groups. Since OA requires anonymity at the public level, please do not print my name.

Dear Friend:

Thanks for the great advice. In my opinion, self help is one of the best resources this country has come up with yet. I am happy to pass on your suggestion.

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BEDSORES:
A PREVENTABLE DISASTER (Continued)

Avenue, Jensen Beach, Florida, 33457-6096. Ask for an application for the materials corresponding to your needs; Discharge Planners or Directors of Nursing—Continence Care Information Center, Physicians and Nurses—Tissue Therapy Information Center, Physical Therapists—Physical Therapy Information Center, and Pharmacists and Home Health Dealers—Take Care America Information Center. The Center makes this information available free. All you pay is the postage.

THANK YOU! Editor's Note: This issue of the Informer was underwritten by an educational grant from the makers of Attends. The Simon Foundation does not endorse specific incontinence products or treatments. Inclusion of our Thank You column in no way implies endorsement. The following column was prepared by Attends.

Protection you need for the confidence you want

ATTENDS BRIEFS AND UNDERGARMENTS

Introducing higher count packs offering value and convenience

Now you can buy Attends Briefs and Undergarments in new, higher count packs and save up to 10% compared to 10-count packages. And for even more savings use the enclosed refund certificate.

Product/New Package Counts
Briefs: Small-50s; Medium-40s; Large-30s
Undergarments: Regular-50s & Super-40s

Attends Undergarments are designed for people with moderate bladder control protection needs. Attends Undergarments provide better protection against leakage than any other Undergarment. Their self-adjusting leg gathes provide snug, comfortable fit, and help reduce odor.

Attends Briefs are designed for people who need more protection than Undergarments. Attends Briefs provide the maximum Attends protection against leakage and odor. Attends Briefs are used by more healthcare professionals than all other Briefs combined. Its patented one way lining locks in wetness to help keep skin dry.

For a free sample of Attends Briefs or Undergarments, or if you have questions about incontinence, you can call toll-free 1-800-4-ATTENDS and talk to a registered nurse.

Don't forget to ask for your free copy of our brochure "Bladder Control Problems—What Is It—What Does It Mean To Me".

ATTENDS
Now Available in Convenient VALUE PACKS
OPINIONS SOUGHT

This newsletter is written for you. It is our objective to facilitate learning which will lead to cure and better care for people with incontinence. Please help us serve you by completing the following questionnaire and mailing it to: The Informer, P.O. Box 835, Wilmette, Illinois 60091.

TYPE OF INFORMATION YOU WOULD LIKE TO READ ABOUT IN THE INFORMER.

Bowel incontinence

Surgeries for incontinence

Products and devices

Psychological problems and coping

Bedwetting

Caring for the elderly

Dealing with bedsores

Other comments

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