



"We Do What We Can" - Health Workers' Management of Incontinent Clients in Rural NSW



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Background

Incontinence is a common problem and can significantly decrease a person's quality of life. The incidence of incontinence increases with age, with one in three women experiencing incontinence throughout their lifetime. In 2010, incontinence cost the Australian community approximately \$42.9 billion dollars.³ The management of incontinence is essential if people are to age at home.

Aim

The aim of this study was to determine how nursing and allied health clinicians currently provide continence services to clients of the Western NSW Local Health District (LHD) and how those services can be improved.

Methodology

The research was carried out using qualitative methods and a positivist approach. Seven one-on-one interviews and four focus groups were conducted with nurses and allied health clinicians who manage clients who are at risk of incontinence. Transcripts of the discussions were coded and thematically analysed.

Results

All clinicians believed they had a role to play in managing their clients who were incontinent. However this did not always translate into practice with the level of identifying, assessing and managing incontinence varying between the health clinicians. Several factors affected the care delivered to clients with incontinence. This included the clinician's level of knowledge relating to continence care and their attitude towards continence management. Competing clinical priorities and lack of time made providing continence management more difficult for the community based nurses. A lack of continence specialist services was also identified as a barrier to providing continence services. The level of the client's knowledge relating to continence management influenced their attitude and whether they sought help for their incontinence. Clinicians identified continence education and an increase in specialised continence resources as enablers for them to improve continence care for their clients.

Conclusions

An increase in resources, education and support for the health clinicians who manage these clients is vital if they are to successfully manage incontinent clients.

For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'

For the past 8 years Louise has been working in continence and stomal therapy for the Western NSW LHD, based in Bathurst. In 2011 she was endorsed as a Nurse Practitioner. She has worked for over 18 years in various community health settings in rural and remote NSW and is passionate about working with rural clients to help improve their quality of life.

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