
Treating Patients with Dignity



A study by Brunel University, London suggests that health and social care professionals put a different emphasis on the meaning of dignity than their patients do. The study has uncovered a gap between what patients expect and the focus of care professionals.

The study included 33 health and social care professionals in eight focus groups. The participants described dignity as the backbone of nursing and mentioned the extra little things that are done for the patients. When asked what dignified care meant to them, most referred to it as a conceptual idea. Having respect for others and ensuring the patients felt safe and secure and were treated as individuals were also mentioned. A few made reference to how dignified care included hands-on tasks such as washing, dressing and feeding.

The participants focused on how care should be delivered ideally and not how it is actually done. The observations suggest a gap in the rhetoric of dignity between professionals' emphasis of what it means on a more conceptual level and how it is actually translated to hands-on-care tasks.

Breaches in dignity are still a problem with the NHS. Hands-on-care tasks are often the focus of such breaches, particularly for older patients who have emphasised the importance of such tasks being provided in a dignified manner.

Christina Victor, Professor of Gerontology and Public Health at Brunel University London, said: "It is important that dignity is enacted through a conceptual understanding and part of everyday care, from communication, safety and security to hands-on-care. Older patients in hospital can be particularly vulnerable and we need to make sure that we don't overlook their need for food, water, warm clothing and hygiene."

She highlighted that the study observed good awareness of the need for respect, politeness and kindness but that there was still a need to emphasise the importance of providing dignified care in every aspect, including hands-on tasks such as feeding and providing hygiene needs.

Source: Brunel University

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