

NURSING PRACTICE: Contenance special Comment

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Landmark guidance puts childhood continence firmly in the spotlight

New NICE guidelines will help nurses to be proactive about improving the lives of children and families who are affected by childhood continence issues, says Jenny Perez

The much anticipated National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidelines on childhood idiopathic constipation (NICE, 2010a) and nocturnal enuresis in children and young people (NICE, 2010b) were launched earlier this year, bringing comprehensive recommendations for assessing, treating and managing these issues.

This guidance offers parents a clear indication of the care they should expect their children to receive. Continence problems cause a great deal of distress to children and their families, and can even lead to the child becoming socially isolated. Parents who telephone the helpline set up by the charity Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence (ERIC) often blame themselves for their child's problem and express

children and families affected by continence problems. It is vital people do not shy away from issues such as bedwetting, soiling and constipation because they are embarrassed. Steps are being made to raise awareness and ERIC has received coverage on national television, radio, in print and online, leading to a rise in visitors to our website and contacts to our helpline and information team.

ERIC now also provides information on toilet training, which enables us to reach parents early, so if they continue to need our services they know where to access help (see Practice review, page 19). We have also launched a national School Toilet Award, which is needed to help tackle problems such as constipation. This year, the Global Handwashing Days survey conducted by the London

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frustration at their inability to resolve it (see Case study, page 21). These guidelines will help parents know what to expect from health professionals and be aware of their own role in resolving and managing their child's continence problems.

This week, the ERIC conference will introduce both guidelines, which will be presented by the chairs of the guideline development groups. The one day conference will also look at the main recommendations and the potential impact on continence services at local and national levels.

Along with many great opportunities, the NICE guidelines will present some challenges. A review of service provision for primary care trusts will be needed to meet the recommendations; as such, it is vital that nurses have a full understanding of the guidance to provide the best possible services.

At ERIC, we were pleased to receive a grant from the Department of Health to help disseminate the guidelines. By using our helpline, website, information leaflets and fact sheets we will ensure important messages are communicated to those who need this information. Our organisation has also developed a training day, focusing on the NICE guidelines, for healthcare professionals who are unable to attend the ERIC conference.

We need to work hard to improve the lives of

School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, showed 40% of children will not use school toilets. A further 2010 survey of nurses and continence specialists, commissioned by the Bog Standard campaign, found school toilets are a contributing factor to continence problems in children and young people.

A lot of these problems could be avoided, alleviated or eradicated with improved school toilet facilities. School toilets are often neglected due to lack of funding, inadequate regulations and because other priorities get in the way. This issue continues to be pushed down the list of priorities by the government. But school toilets are vital – they affect pupils' education and health. And it is ERIC's main aim to make sure this issue, and the impact of childhood continence as a whole, is not neglected. ●

Jenny Perez is director, at Education and Resources for Improving Childhood Continence, Bristol

REFERENCES

- NICE(2010a)DiagnosisandManagementofIdiopathicChildhoodConstipationinPrimaryandSecondaryCare.London:NICE.www.nice.org.uk/CG99
- NICE(2010b)TheManagementofBedwettingandNocturnalEnuresisinChildrenandYoungPeople.London:NICE.www.nice.org.uk/CG11

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