Dignity, Older People, Health & Social Care

Findings from a European Research Project

Maintaining human dignity, particularly in the face of adversity, is a core human value.

Respect for personal identity is the critical aspect of dignity that has to be addressed in health and social care.

Increased reliance on technological solutions to health problems has supplanted human caring and human values.

Fragmentation of health and social care, scarcity of resources and reductionist approaches have dehumanised and desensitised staff.

In health and social care these factors have led to people being treated as objects, rather than individual human beings, resulting in detrimental effects on their well-being.

The ‘Dignity Balance’

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You can promote Dignity by:-

- Conserving the social standing of a person and confirm them in their social roles even when mental or physical deterioration occurs.
- Giving individualized care and support.
- Not putting anyone in a position which is likely to lead to their failure in a group.
- Not emphasising impairments and disabilities in front of others.
- Making the person feel that they have value.
- Supporting and maintaining autonomy.
- Respecting the individual’s habits and values.
- Respecting their home, living place and privacy.
- Providing comfort and consideration.
- Seeking consent for any necessary care.
- Encouraging choice and decision-making.
- Promoting inclusion and participation and avoiding abandoning the person.
- Supporting the person in maintaining their hygiene and personal appearance.
- Allowing the person to take their time. Not hurrying them.
- Adapting care to the needs and rhythm of the Individual.
- Trying to anticipate individual’s needs.
- Respecting the limits of an individual’s capabilities.
- Not performing activities beyond one’s professional competencies.
- Responding courteously to specific requests.
- Being polite: and demonstrating respect even when feeling bad-tempered or stressed.
- Whenever possible getting to know the person, before delivering care.
- Using respectful language and gestures.
- Allowing risk taking.
- Encouraging participation in daily life.
- Retaining a sense of humour.
- Doing one’s absolute best even when time is short.

Indignity will be caused by:-

- Exposing older people to situations they can no longer manage.
- Making older people look or feel ridiculous.
- Treating people as objects.
- Being occupied by the ”material” side of care.
- Not respecting the need for privacy during intimate care.
- Not knocking at the door before entering.
- Not informing people of what is happening.
- Using disrespectful language.
- Not respecting death.
- Speaking about the person in their presence as if they were not there.
- Displaying a disrespectful attitude.
- Changing the person’s environment without their permission.
- Intervening or performing care without consent.
- Not allowing the person to speak.
- Performing actions while ignoring the person.
- Lying to or deceiving people.
- Addressing them in ways they find disrespectful.