First Steps in the Management of Urinary Incontinence in Community-Dwelling Older People

A clinical practice guideline for primary clinicians (registered nurses and allied health professionals)

Third Edition 2010
# Table of Contents

**Preface** ................................................................. 9

1. **Introduction and background** ........................................ 10
   1.1 Rationale .......................................................... 10
   1.2 Format of this guideline .......................................... 11
   1.3 Levels of evidence used in this guideline ......................... 12
   1.4 Icons .................................................................. 14
   1.5 Glossary of Terms .................................................. 15
   1.6 Prevalence .......................................................... 17

2. **Bladder function and urinary incontinence** ......................... 18
   2.1 How the normal bladder works .................................... 18
   2.2 Established and treatable urinary incontinence .................. 19

3. **The impact of ageing on urinary continence** ......................... 21

4. **Factors that contribute to urinary incontinence** .................... 24
   4.1 Arthritis ........................................................... 24
   4.2 Back pain ............................................................ 25
   4.3 Bowel problems .................................................... 25
   4.4 Caffeine ............................................................... 25
   4.5 Cardiac conditions .................................................. 26
   4.6 Childhood history .................................................. 26
   4.7 Dehydration ......................................................... 27
   4.8 Dementia ............................................................... 27
   4.9 Diabetes Mellitus .................................................... 29
   4.10 Ethnicity .............................................................. 30
   4.11 Frailty ................................................................. 30
   4.12 Gynaecological factors ............................................. 31
      4.12.1 Pelvic organ prolapse ......................................... 31
      4.12.2 Gynaecological surgery ...................................... 32
   4.13 Medications .......................................................... 32
   4.14 Mobility .............................................................. 36
   4.15 Obesity ............................................................... 36
   4.16 Oestrogens ........................................................... 40
   4.17 Pregnancy and childbirth .......................................... 41
   4.18 Prostate disorders .................................................. 42
      4.18.1 Radical prostatectomy ......................................... 42
   4.19 Psychiatric/Mental health conditions ............................... 43
      4.19.1 Medications for mental illness that may impact on urinary incontinence ... 44
      4.19.2 Psychogenic polydipsia ....................................... 44
      4.19.3 Toilet facilities and their influence on toileting behaviour .................. 45
   4.20 Respiratory disease .................................................. 45
   4.21 Sleep-disordered breathing ......................................... 46
   4.22 Smoking .............................................................. 46
   4.23 Stroke/Cerebral vascular accident (CVA) ............................ 47
## 5. Constipation

### 5.1 Risk factors

#### 5.1.1 Medications which may cause constipation

### 5.2 Physiological causes

### 5.3 Diagnostic criteria

### 5.4 Dietary fibre and constipation

### 5.5 Probiotics/prebiotics

### 5.6 Assessment of constipation

#### 5.6.1 Subjective assessment/history

#### 5.6.2 Objective assessment

#### 5.6.2.1 Basic objective examination

#### 5.6.2.2 Complex objective assessment

### 5.7 Management of constipation

#### 5.7.1 Types of constipation

##### 5.7.1.1 Acute constipation

##### 5.7.1.2 Simple constipation

##### 5.7.1.3 Chronic constipation

##### 5.7.1.4 Severe constipation leading to faecal impaction

#### 5.7.2 The Stepping out of constipation algorithm

##### 5.7.2.1 Step one: Fluids, fibre and exercise

##### 5.7.2.2 Step two: Bulk forming laxatives

##### 5.7.2.3 Step three: Stool softeners

##### 5.7.2.4 Step four: Osmotic laxatives

##### 5.7.2.5 Step five: Stimulants

##### 5.7.2.6 Step six: Suppositories and enemas

##### 5.7.2.7 Step seven: Colonic lavage

#### 5.7.3 Fluids

#### 5.7.4 Fibre

#### 5.7.5 Laxatives

### 5.8 Good habits for bowel emptying

#### 5.8.1 Timing for bowel emptying

#### 5.8.2 Positioning for bowel emptying

### 5.9 Privacy and dignity

### 6. Risk, economic and environmental factors associated with urinary incontinence

#### 6.1 Admission to residential care

#### 6.2 Carer strain

#### 6.3 Depression

#### 6.4 Economic impact

#### 6.5 Environmental impact

#### 6.6 Falls

#### 6.7 Presentation to acute care

#### 6.8 Reduced fluid intake

#### 6.9 Excessive fluid intake

#### 6.10 Skin breakdown

#### 6.11 Sleep disruption

#### 6.12 Social isolation
7. Psychosocial impact of urinary continence ........................................ 83
   7.1 Attitudes to incontinence: impact on help-seeking behaviour ............ 84
   7.2 Cultural beliefs. ............................................................................. 86
      7.2.1 Indigenous Australians and incontinence ................................ 87
      7.2.2 Non-Indigenous Australian culture and incontinence ............. 88
   7.3 Family ......................................................................................... 89
   7.4 Sexuality ..................................................................................... 89
   7.5 Quality of Life (QoL). ................................................................. 90
      7.5.1 Quality of life assessment tools ............................................. 91
         7.5.1.1 Incontinence Severity Index ............................................ 92
      7.5.1.2 Incontinence Impact Questionnaire – Short Form IIQ-SF7 .... 92
      7.5.2 Coping behaviour ................................................................. 93
   7.6 Motivation and adherence to treatment programs .......................... 93

8. Health care professionals and urinary incontinence: The challenges .... 94
   8.1 Knowledge and awareness of urinary incontinence ........................ 94
   8.2 Talking about urinary incontinence ............................................. 95
      8.2.1 Language issues .................................................................... 95
      8.2.2 Individual and clinician comfort .......................................... 95
      8.2.3 BATHE technique ................................................................. 96
      8.2.4 The PLISSIT model ............................................................... 97

9. Significant and causative factors related to urinary incontinence
   in older people. .............................................................................. 99
   9.1 Significant factors and urinary incontinence: Red Flags. ............... 99
      9.1.1 Pain ...................................................................................... 99
      9.1.2 Recent unexplained weight loss .......................................... 99
      9.1.3 Recent sudden change in bowel habit .................................. 99
      9.1.4 Pelvic mass .......................................................................... 99
      9.1.5 Rectal bleeding ................................................................... 100
      9.1.6 Persistent diarrhoea .............................................................. 100
      9.1.7 Haematuria .......................................................................... 100
      9.1.8 Recurrent symptomatic urinary tract infection ..................... 100
      9.1.9 History of pelvic surgery or irradiation ................................ 101
      9.1.10 Major pelvic organ prolapse .............................................. 101
   9.2 Potentially reversible/treatable causes of urinary incontinence: DIAPPERS ........ 101
      9.2.1 Delirium .............................................................................. 102
      9.2.2 Infection (urinary tract) ....................................................... 102
      9.2.3 Atrophic urethritis/vaginitis ............................................... 104
      9.2.4 Psychological ...................................................................... 104
      9.2.5 Pharmacological ................................................................. 105
      9.2.6 Excessive urine output: polyuria, nocturnal polyuria and nocturia ............ 107
         9.2.6.1 Polyuria ........................................................................ 107
         9.2.6.2 Nocturia ........................................................................ 107
         9.2.6.3 Nocturnal polyuria ........................................................ 109
      9.2.7 Restricted mobility ............................................................... 110
      9.2.8 Stool impaction ................................................................... 111
   9.3 Potentially reversible/treatable causes of urinary incontinence: TOILETED ............. 113

10. Recommendations for referral pathways ...................................... 114
   10.1 Models of continence care ...................................................... 114
   10.2 Clinical algorithm ..................................................................... 114
   10.3 Indications for referral ............................................................ 115
   10.4 Further management .............................................................. 116
11. First steps in the management of urinary incontinence ................. 118
  11.1 Step 1: Establish an appropriate clinical environment .................. 119
  11.2 Step 2: Subjective assessment/history .................................. 119
    11.2.1 Medications ...................................................... 125
    11.2.2 Impact on every day life ..................................... 125
    11.2.3 Motivation and cooperation ................................... 125
  11.3 Step 3: Objective assessment .......................................... 126
    11.3.1 Psychological/behavioural/cognitive status ..................... 126
    11.3.2 Physical examination .......................................... 127
    11.3.3 Bladder diary .................................................. 127
      11.3.3.1 Reasons for use of a bladder diary ...................... 127
      11.3.3.2 Information recorded in a bladder diary ............... 127
      11.3.3.3 Limitations of the bladder diary ...................... 127
      11.3.3.4 Time period required .................................... 128
      11.3.3.5 Instructions for completing a bladder diary ........... 130
      11.3.3.6 Information gained from a bladder diary .............. 132
    11.3.4 Urinalysis ..................................................... 133
  11.4 Step 4: Plan the required interventions .............................. 134
  11.5 Step 5: Implementation of treatment/management interventions ....... 134
    11.5.1 Management of stool impaction ................................ 134
    11.5.2 Fluids, caffeine, alcohol and carbonated drinks ............. 135
      11.5.2.1 Fluids ..................................................... 135
      11.5.2.2 Caffeine .................................................. 137
      11.5.2.3 Alcohol ................................................... 138
      11.5.2.4 Carbonated drinks ....................................... 139
    11.5.3 Nocturia ....................................................... 140
    11.5.4 Good habits for bladder emptying ................................ 140
      11.5.4.1 Avoid ‘hovering’ ......................................... 140
      11.5.4.2 Positioning for bladder emptying ........................ 141
    11.5.5 Exercise ....................................................... 142
      11.5.5.1 General .................................................... 142
      11.5.5.2 Verbal instruction of pelvic floor muscle exercises ..... 143
    11.5.6 Further management ............................................. 146
      11.5.6.1 Measurement of the post-void residual volume (PVR) ... 146
      11.5.6.2 Conservative and behavioural therapies ................ 146
      11.5.6.3 Conservative use of continence aids .................... 146
      11.5.6.4 Medications ............................................... 147
      11.5.6.5 Surgery ................................................... 148
      11.5.6.6 Skin care .................................................. 150
  11.6 Step 6: Evaluate outcomes ............................................ 151
  11.7 Step 7: Review outcomes .............................................. 151
    11.7.1 Ongoing management ........................................... 151
      11.7.1.1 Personal and environmental factors affecting continence 154
12. Development of the guideline ............................................. 160
  12.1 Project Team 2010 ..................................................... 160
  12.2 Additional contributors 2010 ......................................... 160
  12.3 Clinical Expert Panel 2010 ........................................... 160
  12.4 External reviewers 2007 ............................................... 161
  12.5 Search strategy ..................................................... 161
  12.6 Updating of the guideline ............................................ 161
References ................................................................. 162
Index ................................................................. 175
List of Tables

Table 1: The Scottish Intercollegiate Group Network grading system (SIGN) ........................................... 13
Table 2: Summary of lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) ........................................................................ 20
Table 3: Age related changes that may contribute to urinary incontinence .................................................. 22
Table 4: Dehydration risks in the elderly ......................................................................................................... 27
Table 5: Types of prolapse .................................................................................................................................. 31
Table 6: Medications that can cause or aggravate urinary incontinence ......................................................... 34
Table 7: BMI categories ....................................................................................................................................... 37
Table 8: Characteristics of a problem toilet, for people with a psychiatric disorder ......................................... 45
Table 9: Medications which may cause constipation .......................................................................................... 49
Table 10: The Rome II criteria for functional constipation .................................................................................. 51
Table 11: Bowel diary ............................................................................................................................................ 54
Table 12: Food fibre guide ..................................................................................................................................... 65
Table 13: Class of laxatives and time to effect ...................................................................................................... 67
Table 14: Commonly used laxatives ..................................................................................................................... 67
Table 15: Potential interactions of laxatives with other medications ................................................................. 72
Table 16: The BATHE technique ....................................................................................................................... 96
Table 17: The PLISSIT model ............................................................................................................................... 98
Table 18: DIAPPERS mnemonic......................................................................................................................... 102
Table 19: Risk factors for complicated UTI in women ....................................................................................... 104
Table 20: Request for home medicines review .................................................................................................... 106
Table 21: Causes of nocturia, nocturnal polyuria, reduced nocturnal voided volumes and 24 hour polyuria ............................................ 108
Table 22: Causes of sleep disorder ...................................................................................................................... 109
Table 23: TOILETED mnemonic ....................................................................................................................... 113
Table 24: Explanation of the seven steps of the clinical algorithm .................................................................... 118
Table 25: Clinicians guide to questioning .......................................................................................................... 120
Table 26: Bladder diary ......................................................................................................................................... 129
Table 27: Completed bladder diary example ..................................................................................................... 131
Table 28: Fluid Content of various Foods ......................................................................................................... 136
Table 29: Caffeine content in beverages and food ............................................................................................ 138
Table 30: Key elements of individual assessment for the most appropriate continence product ..................... 153
Table 31: Personal and environmental factors affecting continence ................................................................. 154

List of Figures

Figure 1: The Bristol Stool Form Scale ............................................................................................................. 55
Figure 2: Stepping out of constipation algorithm ............................................................................................ 59
Figure 3: Good sitting position for bowel emptying .......................................................................................... 74
Figure 4: Impact of stool impaction on the lower urinary tract ....................................................................... 112
Figure 5: Proposed clinical algorithm for the care of community-dwelling older people with urinary incontinence ........................................ 117
Figure 6: Good sitting position for bladder emptying ..................................................................................... 141
Figure 7: Management of urinary incontinence in frail older persons ............................................................ 149
Figure 8: Types of continence management .................................................................................................. 151
Preface

Urinary incontinence is a common health problem that affects 3.8 million Australians (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). In addition to ageing, risk factors associated with urinary incontinence include pregnancy, childbirth, menopause, high body mass index, lower urinary tract symptoms, constipation, mobility impairment, cognitive impairment and specific surgical procedures such as prostatectomy and hysterectomy (K. Moore, Ho, Lapsley et al., 2006).

Urinary incontinence has further social, physical, emotional and environmental implications for an older person's health, as reflected in the number of health conditions associated with incontinence, including dementia, stroke, cardiac disease, respiratory disease, diabetes and various neurological and musculoskeletal conditions. Urinary incontinence contributes to social isolation and depression, and increases the risk of falls and the risk of admission to residential care. It is well documented that urinary incontinence has far reaching implications for clinicians and health care workers in a variety of residential and in-home care locations. The financial impact of urinary and faecal incontinence on the health and residential aged care systems totalled $1.5 billion in 2003, with $111.7 million of this spent on continence aids (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). The economic impact of incontinence on the individual and his/her family is also significant.

In keeping with the Queensland Health Clinical Practice Guideline Development Framework, clinical practice guidelines require ongoing review and updating to ensure current evidence based practice. This is the third edition of the ‘First Steps in the Management of Urinary Incontinence in Community-Dwelling Older People: A clinical practice guideline, 2005’ which was first printed by the HACC/MASS Continence Project following recommendations in February 2002 from the Statewide HACC Continence Report. This edition comprises a review of available literature, recommendations from the International Continence Society and expert opinion, which have been combined to form the evidence based practice recommendations within this guideline. The guideline has been developed to support Queensland primary level health professionals in undertaking the ‘first steps’ in the assessment and management of urinary incontinence in community-dwelling older people. Clinical and consumer resources have also been developed to support clinicians using this guideline based on the feedback received from health professionals.

The HACC/MASS Continence Project team are committed to providing ongoing support and evidence based practice to health professionals, to assist in the provision of high quality continence care and to ensure optimum quality of life and improved health outcomes for older people with urinary incontinence. To this end, a second guideline ‘Second Steps in the Management of Urinary Incontinence in Community Dwelling Older People: A clinical practice guideline for secondary level clinicians (continence advisors and continence physiotherapists), second edition 2008’ has also been developed.

Through using this document to guide clinical practice, and encouraging early intervention in the area of urinary incontinence, clinicians will aim to ensure that fewer older people have reduced participation in the community due to bladder and bowel problems, and that only those with ongoing, untreatable urinary problems are managed by use of continence aids and products.

I recommend this guideline to all health professionals working in the community with older people to assist them in managing urinary continence problems, and to enable these people to enjoy optimum quality of life and improved health outcomes.

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