

SURVEY PAINTS A BLEAK PICTURE OF FUNDING FOR CONTINENCE CARE SERVICES

A recent AHPMA survey among continence care professionals has painted a bleak picture on the current state of many continence services in the UK, largely due to lack of Government funding. The survey finds that continence care staff are striving for quality care within extremely limited resources.

The survey received 148 responses, which show an unacceptably low level of funding in many Primary Care Trusts; morale being lower than five years ago in over half of Trusts; increased workloads and vacancies not being filled. It demonstrates a wide variance in Continence Services and shows little evidence that the 'Good practice in continence services' document published by the Department of Health in 2000 has been considered by Trusts.

Two fifths of respondents say that waiting times for assessment and provision of products are increasing, several months not being unusual, and one Trust actually reporting waiting times of over 12 months.

Responses indicated that around half of Trusts exclude certain patients groups from receiving products, for example one group listed is those with 'light urinary incontinence' but without defining what volume of urinary loss is considered 'light' as opposed to 'medium' or 'heavy.' Patient choice is also found to be restricted.

Quality continence services and products are essential for patients and carers alike. Regular assessment and correct products are vital for quality of life, independence and health. Given the prevalence of this condition across all age groups but predominantly among the older population and other vulnerable groups, AHPMA would encourage a radical review of Continence Services at Government level, with strategic planning for increased demands on the services due to an ageing population, and mandatory targets for trusts.

AHPMA is the trade association which represents key UK manufacturers of absorbent disposable continence care products. To review the full survey visit www.ahpma.co.uk or contact AHPMA on 01483 418312 to receive a copy.

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Editors notes:

Incontinence is more prevalent than asthma, epilepsy and dementia. Currently 4-6 million people will suffer from some form of incontinence in the UK which affects men, women and children, for a wide variety of reasons. It is also a 'taboo' subject preventing many people from seeking help to a problem that can often be improved and in many cases cured which would save the NHS money in the long term.

Facts:

- 4-6 million people in the UK will suffer from some form of incontinence – 6% of the population
 - Incontinence can mean anything from an occasional light involuntary leakage of urine, to moderate or heavy leakage and/or loss of bowel control. This condition may be temporary or long term depending on its cause and treatment.
 - Incontinence is more prevalent than asthma, epilepsy and dementia
 - Around only one in four people who suffer urinary incontinence seek help – 85% could possibly be cured* (*Royal College of Physicians 2005)
 - Incontinence is often the main reason why people move into residential care homes
 - The average increase of incontinent clients per NHS Trust is 8% per annum, many with increasing dependency costs
 - 3,680,000 people self fund purchasing of absorbent continence products at home.
 - The Government had a mandatory target to deliver integrated incontinence services by April 2004. In December 2006, the Royal College of Physicians survey indicated that integrated services are "still a dream rather than a reality"
 - Integrated Continence Services was a recommendation from the DoH in 2000, but have been developed in only in only 53 out of 138 Primary Care Sites.
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- **AHPMA members are: Abena UK Ltd, Arquest Ltd, Attends Ltd, Johnson & Johnson GmbH, Kimberly-Clark Ltd, Lille Healthcare Ltd, Lil-lets (UK) Ltd, Multibrands International Ltd, Ontex Retail UK Ltd, Playtex Products Inc, Procter & Gamble UK, SCA Hygiene Products Ltd, Paul Hartmann Ltd, Toiletry Sales Ltd.**