

# Helping improve clients' quality of life

Sometimes introducing a new product or piece of equipment can enhance clients' quality of life.

By Marian Weststrate

**A**s nurses working with patients in the community and hospitals, we all come across situations where we see patients struggling to use some products or equipment. Nurses are known as problem solvers and, as such, we should not accept such situations, if there are affordable solutions which would make life easier for those struggling with some products.

In my work as a district nurse I have encountered patients trying to secure a urinary or wound drainage bag onto their leg in a way that ensures the bag doesn't drag uncomfortably and isn't visible. Elastic leg bag straps can cause pain or swelling to the legs or irritate the skin and this can require a nurse's attention. I have seen swollen legs, blisters due to shear and pressure, and irritation, all caused by elastics straps. I have come across moist or dirty straps – from urine or shower water?

And I've seen straps not tight enough to prevent the urinary bag dropping down under the client's clothing or dragging on the floor. To prevent this happening, I have seen safety-pins

used to fasten the elastic leg-bag straps or (multiple) knots in the elastic straps to tighten them because the Velcro is not holding them together tightly enough. I'm sure other nurses have come across similar situations.

For many years there has been more comfortable alternatives on the market. Light-weight, stretchy leg-bag holders have an inner pocket designed to hold the leg bag and an opening at the bottom for the drainage tap (see above). It is like a sleeve which can be worn around the thigh or the calf and

is available in various sizes. It is made from synthetic or natural stretchy material, which allows the bag to fill up. It evenly spreads the pressure of the bag, secures it to the leg and prevents it from dragging down (see right). It minimises direct contact between the leg bag and the patient's skin. The leg-bag holders are machine and hand washable and, therefore, reusable. Whenever we come across patients with newly inserted catheters, we offer them the sleeved leg-bag holders.

I am not promoting a certain supplier or brand, as funding them is the responsibility of the district health board (DHB) or the Accident Compensation Corporation. But many leg-bag holders can be viewed on the internet.

I understand Capital and Coast DHB fund the leg-bag holders and they are no more expensive than the former elastic straps.

When we introduced the leg-bag holders to our community health service, the majority of patients were in favour of them. However, there was a small number of patients who were not able to use them. One man with decreased mobility had difficulty bending over to open the drainage connection. With the elastic straps, he just pulled the bag up his leg. A wheelchair-bound lady preferred to



have her urinary drainage bag attached to her wheelchair.

I have been asked whether people with dementia could use these leg-bag holders. In my work, I have not come across many patients with cognitive decline who have catheters – the majority of those who are incontinent are using other products, such as pads.

I hope this article raises awareness of products that can help improve the quality of life for those of our clients who have catheters. •

Marian Weststrate, RN, BN, is a district nurse with Capital and Coast DHB, based on the Kapiti Coast.

## In the words of two grateful clients . . .

\* Hi Marian,

I want to thank you for introducing "leg-bag pocket socks" for Mum's catheter drainage bag to us. The leg-bag socks have made a difference. Prior to the leg-bag pocket sock, the bags were held in place with elastic straps. They tended to be uncomfortable and often failed to hold the catheter drainage bag up. To overcome this failure meant tightening the straps and as a consequence caused Mum's leg to swell. To counter this, we alternated the leg which had the bag on. The straps also left marks on the skin.

Now with the leg pocket socks Mum does not have any of these issues. She finds the socks are comfortable, don't fall down and don't leave marks.

Thanks again for that little something which makes life more pleasant.

\* Marian Weststrate from Community Health Services has been so helpful to deal with catheters inserted in my bladder. She also provided some double sleeve supports, which I found very good to hold the catheter day bag in position and give good access to the outlet control clip when the bag is emptied during the day. The double sleeve arrangement supports the bag well and keeps it clear from direct contact with my leg.

I have had excellent support during this time of bladder problems by Community Health Services.

\* Marian Weststrate has the names of these clients, Ed.