Aim of Study

Urinary incontinence is a common consequence of stroke reported to occur in up to 40% of survivors. Nurses are the main providers of continence care yet little is known about how post-stroke incontinence is managed in hospital, although containment activities predominate. Reasons why nurses contain urinary incontinence and active approaches to support recovery of bladder function are less commonly found and not understood. The Theory of Planned Behaviour posits that intention to behave predicts actual behaviour. This study aimed therefore to explain nurses continence care practices with acute stroke patients by exploring stroke nurses intentions towards continence care, with the hypothesis that nurses may intend to contain urinary incontinence rather than actively promote urinary continence from the outset.

Study design and methods

• A structured survey tool was developed to measure nurses’ intentions towards continence care in acute stroke patients with urinary incontinence.
• The questionnaire was developed, piloted and psychometrically tested with a sample of 30 nurses.
• A postal survey of the membership of a national stroke nurses forum (N= 186) was undertaken over a 6 week period.
• Key principles to improve survey response rates were implemented in the design.

Results

186 postal questionnaires were sent out with 81 completed questionnaires analysed (43% response rate). Correlational analysis of the ordinal data using Spearman’s rho with significance set at p<0.05 (2-tailed) and Bonferroni corrected for multiple comparisons (p<0.016) explored nurses’ intentions to promote continence. Behavioural beliefs (including nurses attitudes towards continence promotion), subjective norms (the significant people who would approve or disapprove of the type of continence care nurses carry out) and perceived behavioural control (the level of control that the nurse believe they have over their choice of approach to continence care) were explored.

Table 1 highlights (in yellow) a significant positive correlation between subjective norms & perceived behavioural control (p<0.001), subjective norms and general intention (p<0.001) and perceived behavioural control and general intention (p<0.001). These findings show that significant others impact on the nurses’ perceived behavioural control over continence care provision. They also show that both significant others and nurses perceived behavioural control influence the general intention of nurses towards continence promotion in acute stroke patients.

Interpretation of results

These findings suggest that significant others such as managers, stroke patients and doctors play a fundamental part in determining the control that stroke nurses believe they have over continence care activities and therefore their intention to promote continence in patients with urinary incontinence following a stroke, or to use containment approaches.

Concluding message

Both significant others and nurses’ perceptions about their level of control over their continence care activities are indicators of stroke nurse’s intentions towards continence care in acute stroke patients with urinary incontinence. Although nurses intend to promote continence, internal and external barriers exist. Continence care practices with acute stroke patients are shaped by the opinions and actions of significant others such as colleagues and patients, which govern the nurses beliefs around their perceived authority to act.

References:
2. Fishbein M, Ajzen I (1975) Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research, Addison-Wesley: Reading, MA