

BED BATH - WASHING A BEDRIDDEN PATIENT BY USING WATER AND COMMON SOAP

The patient's body care is part of the overall health care, including the health care of those in contact with the patient. The body care of a patient who cannot wash himself/herself is necessary for providing comfort and cleanliness. A rigorous body hygiene contributes to the prevention of infections in the body and the hospital.

As in other matters, there are cultural differences across countries, in urban vs rural environments. Also, procedures may sometimes differ even within the same hospital. In Morocco, for instance, according to Yassine, a patient's hygiene takes 40 minutes a day in ICU compared to 20 minutes a day in other wards.

The main objectives for bathing the patient in all the world's countries are hygiene and cleanliness. Second comes verbal communication. There is also non-verbal communication, which is more than 80% of all communication (with touch being the most important non-verbal form of exchange). In Europe, touch is accepted and even desired by the patient. The patient experiences touch as potential for a personalized relationship and privileged attention. The talking patient is being listened to and comforted by another, thus feeling less alone and safer. Somebody is doing something exclusively for him/her.

In Islamic states the situation is totally different. One of the fundamental cultural differences is related to shame and religion. Care by others not part of the family places the patient in front of a "mirror which shows him/her through the eyes of the other." Nurses in Morocco, when asked how they deal with the patients in such situations, talked about having to struggle with patients' shame. Female patients refuse to have their intimate parts washed, which causes delays until the arrival of accepted family members and even undermines the treatment (e.g. surgical) with the risk of infection.

Mehdi, a young medical student, tells of an experience he had in Senegal, where he was volunteering. While filling in the medical file of a patient about to be admitted to hospital, he tried to ask her the usual questions. She was covered from head to toes, she did not look at him and she did not answer. Then, Mehdi, who was born in Tunisia but raised in Europe, tried to touch her hand in order to encourage her, thinking she was shy. The woman stared to scream, complain, cry and wash the hand. At the time, the student was shocked by her reaction, until he told his colleagues about it. According to the traditions of certain tribes in Senegal, a person who touches you may change your destiny for the worse and, if that person is white, bad things will surely happen.

Topics for Forum:

- ! Share with us any relevant experiences you have had.