Importance of Sexual Health & Intimacy

Sexual health & intimacy needs may continue as an individual ages or sustains a significant injury or chronic illness.

The need for human touch, closeness, and intimacy are essential components of overall health and quality of life. Requiring supportive care with activities of daily living (ADL’s) should not equate to losing the opportunity to engage in intimate and sexual behaviors on one’s own or with a partner.

People living with spinal cord injury (SCI) and other disabilities, chronic illnesses, or cognitive impairment, continue to face challenges in having their sexual expression accepted and supported. This is particularly true when individuals require personal care for their activities of daily living (ADLs) and/or live in supported housing.¹

Sexual health and intimacy are known to be of top priority to those living with SCI.²,³

Our goal is to provide care providers with practice guidelines, and consumers with a resource, which includes ethical, legal and clinical perspectives that aim to help you safely support your clients’ sexual health & intimacy needs.

Vancouver Coastal Health

Contributors:

Marie Carlson RN, BSN, CR(C)
Sexual Health Clinician | Sexual Health Rehab Service | GF Strong Rehab Centre
Vancouver Coastal Health

Bethan Everett MBA Ph.D.
Senior Leader, Ethics Services
Vancouver Coastal Health | Clinical Professor
UBC Faculty of Medicine

Venus G. Villasos
PEER CA (Partnering Enhancing Excellence in Residential) | LTC & AL Professional Practice Team | Vancouver Coastal health

Lisa Salazar MAPP, SCP
Certified Spiritual Care Practitioner
Vancouver Coastal Health

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History, Research & Tools Available

- 1992 Discussions Began! Task Force: George Pearson Centre/GF Strong Rehab
- 2006 Development of Guidelines, International Literature search, & Provincial Focus Group
- 2017-2018 Environmental Scan (ESCAN) of Long Term Care and Group Homes in VCH & Providence Health Care (PHC) found:
  - 85% had questions or concerns related to resident’s sexuality, intimacy and related issues
  - 62% had moral distress in addressing this area
  - 24% do not have skills to address issues
  - 77% sometimes have skills
  - 8% do have the skills
- 2019-2021 Decision Support Tool (DST) Supporting Sexual Health and Intimacy in Long-term Care Homes, Assisted Living, Group Homes, & Supported Housing
  - Developed by interdisciplinary & consumer working group.
  - Endorsed by VCH & PHC
- 2021 Six on-line modules available soon on the Learning HUB (Pilot target October 2021)
  - [https://learninghub.phsa.ca/Courses/25808](https://learninghub.phsa.ca/Courses/25808)

ESCAN 2017-2018:
Clinicians and leaders were asked to identify the issues that have occurred in the past year:

- a. Verbal sexual comments to staff: 69%
- b. Verbal sexual comments to other residents: 54%
- c. Physical sexual touch of staff: 62%
- d. Physical sexual touch of other residents: 46%
- e. Resident exposing self sexually: 31%
- f. Public sexual activity: 23%
- g. Requests for assistance to find relationship: 38%
- h. Request for assistance to find sexual partner: 31%
- i. Staff moral distress re: sexual behaviours: 62%

Calls to Action

Use these resources to support caregivers to develop & implement best practice

Advocate for your clients’ sexual & intimate well-being

Promote clients emotional and physical health and wellness

Contribute as consumers and caregivers to the cultural change in how we support peoples’ sexual lives.

Footnotes: