



Sexual Health & Intimacy: A Decision Support Tool as a Model of Care and Advocacy

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.



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. Villaos
PEER CA (Partnering Enhancing Excellence in Residential) | LTC & AL Professional Practice Team | Vancouver Coastal Health

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

Thank you to all the Decision Support Tool working group members and everyone who has contributed to this initiative over the years.

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
- **2009** Guidelines published: 'Supporting Sexual Health and Intimacy for Adults Living in Long-term Care Facilities & Group Homes in BC, Canada.' Supported by Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), BC Ministry of Health Services (BCMHS), Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), GF Strong Rehab: <https://bit.ly/3yDYRTi>
- **2013** Pocket Guide published, a user-friendly document with case examples: Funded by PHAC, Copyright Spinal Cord Injury BC (SCIBC) <https://bit.ly/3BuiGy8>
- **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 <https://bit.ly/38pCV3z>
- **2021** Six on-line modules available soon on the Learning HUB (Pilot target October 2021) <https://learninghub.phsa.ca/Courses/25808>

Footntes:

- 1 Sexuality & Access Project: Silverberg, C., & Odette, F., 2011 <https://bit.ly/3jtr3DM>
- 2 Hansen, R., 2012: Capturing Capacity in Canadian SCI Rehab p. 150-158 <https://bit.ly/3jtryOa>
- 3 Anderson K. Targeting recovery: Priorities of the spinal cord injured population. J Neurotrauma. 2004; 21(10):1371-1383.

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.

Presented at



THE INTERNATIONAL SPINAL CORD SOCIETY ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC MEETING ISCoS 2021: VIRTUAL