

The Case of the Wet Surgical Dressing

Improving Skin Care and MDRO Prevention in Long-Term Care



The Case

A certified nursing assistant (CNA) is assisting a 65-year-old man with a bed bath. The resident had surgery for a total hip replacement 3 days earlier. He is getting wound assessments and dressing changes once daily.



The Challenge

The CNA takes care to avoid the dressing covering the surgical site for the hip replacement, but when cleaning the resident's leg, forgets to wring out the soapy washcloth. Soapy water drips down the leg and saturates part of the surgical dressing, and the CNA uses a dry cloth to wipe up the excess fluid. The CNA is embarrassed about the mistake and does not tell the resident's nurse that the dressing accidentally became wet during the bed bath. She reasons that because it is clean soapy water, it will not do any harm.

The Error

Because the CNA did not let the resident's nurse know about the wet dressing, bacteria are able to grow and thrive. The nurse the next day notices a little more redness around the wound, and plans to keep an eye on it. Because the nurse was not made aware by the CNA of the dressing getting wet, the resident ends up with a methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* infection and will need intravenous antibiotics for 6 weeks.

Knowledge Check Questions

1. What could the CNA have done to prevent the dressing from becoming wet during the bed bath?

- A. Skipped the bed bath until the dressing was removed.
- B. Removed excess moisture from the washcloth.
- C. Used a dry cloth to cover the skin above the dressing.
- D. B and C.

2. How can the team prevent this error from happening again?

- A. Provide CNAs specific training about caring for residents with surgical wounds.
- B. Provide CNAs specific training about how to give a bed bath to someone with pain and limited mobility.
- C. Invest in premoistened bathing cloths for the care of residents with recent surgical wounds.
- D. All of the above.

Rationale for Each Answer

Rationale for question 1

The CNA should have removed excess moisture from the washcloth, so it was not so wet that water dripped down the resident's leg, and used a dry cloth to cover the skin above the dressing, in case of dripping. After the dressing became saturated, the CNA should have informed the resident's nurse so that the dressing could be promptly changed.

Rationale for question 2

All of the above can prevent this error from happening again.