

Promoting Children's Continence through Multidisciplinary Collaboration and Early Intervention

In October 2018 The Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland facilitated a multi-disciplinary workshop to develop children's continence services throughout Northern Ireland. At this time it was recognised that the provision of children's continence care in Northern Ireland was inconsistent across the five health and social care Trusts and some Trusts were not compliant with NICE guidelines and Quality Standards. The multidisciplinary group, which included nurses, health visitors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, doctors, learning disability nurses, CAMH and ASD practitioners, and education professionals, had representatives from all Trusts in Northern Ireland and agreed that standards could be raised and inequalities addressed by developing regional pathways and guidelines.

Work began within the group to assess what "good" continence care for children looked like in Northern Ireland. This considered views of professionals working in continence care, the children who use the service, the families who use the service and other professionals who have contact with the service. From this assessment, with the assistance of Bowel & Bladder UK, children's continence care pathways were developed which every Trust agreed to implement. The care pathways detailed clearly level 1 and level 2 interventions for children with continence issues. The pathways aimed to ensure early assessment and identify comorbidities; promoting effective management of incontinence and other bladder and bowel problems, such as constipation and urinary tract infection. By implementing the pathways Trusts aimed to reduce the impact of continence issues on social, physical and mental wellbeing of children and young people as well as reduce expensive containment product use, reduce complications associated with continence and prevent hospital admissions.

From the pathways, Trusts were able to formulate local implementation plans to include short and long term actions to improve the continence care provided to children and young people and ensure an equitable continence service throughout Northern Ireland.

When the pathways were agreed, training days were provided for anyone likely to come into contact with a child with continence issues including health care professionals, education staff, and voluntary sector staff. The training days provided an opportunity to introduce the pathways, along with a resource pack developed by Bladder & Bowel UK, and provide professionals with the necessary skills to provide level 1 continence care and advice on how and when to refer on to level 2 services.

A regional forum group was also established for practitioners working in level 2 and level 3 children's continence services which meets regularly to share and review practice. This forum provides support and peer supervision for the small number of professionals in Northern Ireland working in children's continence clinics and has been an excellent resource for the newly appointed children's continence nurse specialists.

Children's continence care services continue to develop in Northern Ireland and through the development of these pathways, it has been demonstrated how early intervention and multidisciplinary working improves outcomes for children with continence issues. This in turn has led to the appointment of several new children's continence nurse posts throughout Northern Ireland. Work continues on establishing regional policy and protocols and on establishing multi-disciplinary assessment and management of children with continence issues, striving to provide an integrated children's continence service.