Extract from a stand-alone literature review
[Nursing]

What is in this guide

• An extract from an example of a literature review (nursing)
• Annotations on features of the extract
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An example extract with annotations

(2000 words)

Introduction

Development of decubitus ulcers is a major concern in nursing today. These ulcers significantly depress people’s quality of life; prolong hospitalisations, cause infections, and even death. Therefore, it is imperative that nurses acquire appropriate knowledge and develop sufficient skills to assess susceptibilities and implement prevention strategies. This literature review describes decubitus ulcers, outlines the predisposing factors for developing decubitus ulcers and considers the role of nursing care in their prevention.

A decubitus ulcer, often referred to as a pressure ulcer or a pressure sore, is defined as “an area of unrelieved pressure over a defined area, usually over a bony prominence, resulting in ischemia, cell death, and tissue necrosis” (NPUAP, 1989, cited in Salcido, 2005, p. 1). It is widely accepted that the primary cause of decubitus ulcer formation is a combination of the intensity of pressure and the duration of pressure (Armstrong & Bortz, 2001, p. 647; Braden...
A decubitus ulcer is a consequence of ischemia and anoxia to tissue (Ebersole & Hess, 2001, p. 243; Pedley, 1999, p. 433; Santamaria, 2004, p. 1435). External pressure, greater than that of capillary pressure, would slow down blood flow in the capillaries and also lymphatic flow through the lymph nodes (Santamaria, 2004, p. 1435). As a result, this leads to an inadequate supply of oxygen and nutrients and insufficient evacuation of metabolic wastes, resulting in tissue ischaemia and in turn, necrosis (Defloor, 1999, p. 208; Ebersole & Hess, 2001, p. 243; Keller et al., 2002, p. 1381; Pedley, 1999, p. 433; Santamaria, 2004, p. 1435). Ischaemia may be evident by skin discoloration such as erythema in light skin or purple in darkly pigmented skin. Erythema is followed by oedema, then blister, and ultimately, ulceration if the blisters slough (Ebersole & Hess, 2001, p. 243). Defloor (2009) explains that ‘the intensity of the pressure and the duration the pressure is sustained to cause damage depends on the individual’s tissue tolerance’ (p. 207). Although decubitus ulcers can develop anywhere on the body, the sacral areas and heels are the most susceptible because these areas intensively receive body weight while resting in a bed or on a chair (Clay, 2004, p. 96; Ebersole & Hess, 2001, p. 243; Ferguson et al., 2000, p. 164; Lindgren et al., 2004, p. 59; Pedley, 1999, p. 438; Perry, 2004, p. 164).

**Risk factors for the development of decubitus ulcers**

There are distinct factors that can contribute to the development of decubitus ulcers. The following six factors: immobility, poor sensory input; shear and friction forces; poor nutritional status; advancing age and impaired capillary circulation are consistently reported in the literature as key risk factors for pressure ulcer development and will be the focus of this review.

**Immobility**

**Poor Sensory Input**

**Shear and Friction Forces**

**Poor Nutritional Status**

Several authors state that there is a strong relationship between nutritional status and pressure ulcer development (Bradan et al., 2000, p. 107; Ferguson et al., 2000, p. 166; Santamaria, 2004, p. 1445). Thomas (1997, cited in Ferguson et al., 2000, p. 166) shows...
that patients with malnutrition at hospital admission are twice as likely to develop pressure ulcers as well-nourished patients. Poor nutritional status often leads to hypoalbuminemia and anaemia (Braden et al., 2000, p. 107). According to Santamaria (2004, p. 1446), total protein levels below 5.4g/100mL can drop colloid osmotic pressure. Consequently, fluid shifts from the extracellular fluid volume to the tissue, resulting in interstitial oedema. It is reported (e.g. Anthony et al., 2000, p. 359; Lindgren et al., 2004, p. 61; Santamaria, 2004, p.1446) that a person with low serum albumin level (below 3g/100mL) is at greater risk of decubitus ulcers. Anthony et al. (2000, p. 363) assessed serum albumin in elderly inpatients and attested that serum albumin can be one of the reliable predictors for risk of developing decubitus ulcers. Although it is recognised that deficiencies of vitamin A, vitamin C and zinc delay wound healing, there is no strong evidence that these deficiencies affect the development of decubitus ulcers (Defloor, 1999, p. 212; Ferguson et al., 2000, p. 171). People with poor nutrition often face serious muscle atrophy (in particular when coupled with immobilisation) and decreases in subcutaneous tissue mass (Santamaria, 2004, p. 1446). On account of these changes, tissues between the skin and underlying bone are diminished and the effects of pressure are increased on remaining tissues.

**Advancing Age**

*Impaired Capillary Circulation*

**The Role of Nursing Care**

**Conclusion**

Immobility, poor sensory input, shear and friction forces, poor nutritional status, advancing age and impaired capillary circulation are significant factors in the development of decubitus ulcers. Nurses should...
always pay attention to these risk factors in order to prevent the development of decubitus ulcers.

Reference List

The reference list appears on a new page at the end of the review.

Related Quick Guide

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