Improving care for patients who have catheters

By Erin Dean

Essential information
Continence is one of the fundamentals of nursing care and maintaining continence can help safeguard a patient’s quality of life.

Many people may need catheters to help them manage everyday activities. Catheters can provide an effective way of draining the bladder, both in the short and long term, however their use increases the risk of infection.

What’s new
The RCN has published updated guidance to improve the use and safety of catheters in the NHS and independent healthcare sectors.

It aims to support a full understanding of the National Occupational Standards, which were developed by the RCN and the not-for-profit organisation Skills for Health to improve the quality of catheter care.

The guidance deals with how to insert and secure urethral catheters and how to monitor and help individuals to monitor urethral catheters.

It covers management of suprapubic catheters, assessment of whether a patient is able to pass urine when a catheter is removed, and enabling individuals to carry out intermittent self-catheterisation.

Ongoing care and how to review catheter care is also explained.

The RCN describes in detail the documentation that nurses should complete in relation to the use and removal of catheters, as well as the anatomy and physiology knowledge nurses require to understand how to use catheters safely.

The updated guidance covers obtaining patient consent and deciding when and why a catheter should be used.

It also explains the importance of risk assessment, the factors that increase the risk of infection and other complications, and the risks that catheter use can bring.

Aspects that should be covered in patient education, including good hand hygiene, are also included.

Erin Dean is a health journalist

Implications for nurses

» Catheters should only be used after all alternatives have been considered

» It is essential that risk assessment is an integral part of catheter care in all care settings. Using any form of catheter has associated risks

» Obtaining consent is essential before carrying out catheterisation

» The document sets out detailed information on the records to keep, including checklists for drainage equipment documentation, catheter removal documentation and ongoing observations documentation

» Providing the patient with a urinary catheter passport supports consistency of catheter care