



Spruce Up: A Nursing-Led Patient Grooming And Presentation Protocol To Enhance Patient Dignity, Healing, And Perception Of Care In Hospital Settings

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Abstract

Patient dignity, comfort, and perception of care are essential components of quality nursing practice. While clinical interventions remain central to patient recovery, non-clinical aspects such as patient grooming, hygiene, and presentation also contribute significantly to patient well-being and the perceived quality of healthcare services. The “Spruce Up” initiative is a structured nursing-led protocol designed to ensure that hospitalized patients appear clean, comfortable, and presentable during visiting hours and while being transported for procedures. This manuscript describes the conceptualization, components, and implementation framework of the Spruce Up toolkit developed to enhance patient dignity, improve patient and family satisfaction, and strengthen professional nursing image. The protocol includes structured grooming practices, hygiene maintenance, clothing management, oral care, cultural sensitivity measures, and safe patient transport practices. Integrating such a protocol into routine nursing care promotes compassionate caregiving, reinforces professional standards, and improves the overall patient experience within healthcare institutions.

Index terms : Patient Dignity, Patient Experience , Compassionate Nursing Care , Holistic Nursing Care ,Nursing Professionalism, Patient-Centred Care

Introduction

Patient dignity is a fundamental component of ethical nursing practice and holistic healthcare delivery. Hospitalized patients often experience vulnerability due to illness, dependency, and unfamiliar surroundings, making compassionate nursing care essential in preserving their self-esteem and emotional well-being (Adib-Hajbaghery & Aghajani, 2015). Maintaining cleanliness, grooming, and personal appearance is an important yet frequently overlooked aspect of patient-centered care that contributes significantly to comfort, dignity, and recovery.

The visual presentation of hospitalized patients can influence the perceptions of family members, visitors, and other stakeholders regarding the quality of care delivered by healthcare institutions. A well-groomed patient reflects attentiveness, compassion, and professionalism in nursing practice. Additionally,

maintaining hygiene and personal grooming contributes positively to patient morale, comfort, and recovery.

Despite routine morning care provided in most hospital settings, patients may appear untidy or fatigued by the time visiting hours occur or when they are transported for diagnostic procedures. These moments represent highly visible points of interaction between patients, families, and healthcare providers. Therefore, structured preparation during these periods can significantly improve patient experience and institutional image.

To address this gap, the “Spruce Up” initiative was conceptualized as a nursing-led protocol to ensure that patients remain clean, comfortable, and presentable during visiting hours and while being transported for procedures. The initiative emphasizes sincerity, ownership, and compassionate service in nursing practice. Studies have shown that visible signs of attentiveness and dignified care positively influence patient satisfaction and family perceptions regarding the quality of healthcare services (Ekpenyong et al., 2021).

The initiative emphasizes sincerity, ownership, and compassionate care, recognizing that true service in healthcare goes beyond measurable tasks and reflects a deeper commitment to patient dignity and respect.

Concept and Objectives of the Spruce Up Protocol

The Spruce Up toolkit was designed with the primary objective of ensuring that patients remain “fit to be seen” during visiting hours and when they are wheeled out for procedures.

The protocol focuses on three major goals:

1. Preserving Patient Dignity

Ensuring that patients maintain a clean and comfortable appearance helps them feel respected and valued despite their illness.

2. Enhancing Patient Healing and Comfort

Maintaining hygiene, grooming, and comfort measures can contribute positively to patient morale and emotional well-being.

3. Strengthening Professional Image of Nursing Care

The visible presentation of patients reflects the professionalism and attentiveness of nursing staff and influences the reputation of healthcare institutions.

Additionally, the initiative aims to reinforce compassionate caregiving by encouraging nurses to adopt a sense of ownership toward patient appearance and comfort.

Methodology

Development of the Spruce Up Toolkit

The Spruce Up protocol was developed as part of a service excellence initiative focusing on improving patient experience in hospital settings. The toolkit integrates routine nursing care practices with additional grooming and presentation elements implemented during critical patient interaction times.

The toolkit outlines a final preparation checklist that nurses perform before visiting hours and before transporting patients out of the ward. These practices are intended to complement routine morning care rather than replace existing nursing procedures.

Components of the Spruce Up Protocol

1. Patient Bed and Environment Preparation

The patient's immediate environment contributes to the perception of care quality.

Key measures include:

Ensuring the bed sheet is clean, neat, and properly tucked

Removing unnecessary clutter from the bedside

Ensuring medical equipment and tubing are arranged safely and neatly

A tidy environment promotes comfort and conveys organized care delivery.

2. Patient Clothing and Personal Appearance

Clean clothing significantly improves patient comfort and appearance.

Key steps include:

Ensuring the hospital gown is clean and free from stains

Replacing the gown if there are food, medication, or fluid stains

Ensuring the gown is properly tied and positioned

This measure helps maintain patient dignity and prevents accidental exposure.

3. Personal Hygiene and Skin Care

Maintaining facial cleanliness and skin hydration helps patients feel refreshed.

Recommended practices include:

Cleaning the patient's face

Applying moisturizer when appropriate

Ensuring overall skin cleanliness

These small interventions can significantly improve patient comfort and self-esteem.

4. Hair Grooming

Hair grooming contributes to a patient's overall appearance and comfort.

Practices include:

Ensuring hair is combed and neatly arranged

For female patients, tying two plaits instead of a bun, when culturally appropriate

Hair grooming helps patients feel more comfortable and dignified.

5. Oral Care and Lip Hydration

Oral hygiene is an important component of patient comfort.

The protocol recommends:

Cleaning the mouth using water or mouthwash after meals

Applying lip balm to prevent dryness

These measures improve comfort and prevent oral discomfort.

6. Fragrance and Freshness

Patients should feel fresh and comfortable.

Measures include:

Applying mild perfume or eau-de-cologne

Maintaining a basic grooming kit within the unit

These practices should be used carefully and with patient consent.

7. Grooming for Male Patients

When medically appropriate and permitted:

Male patients may have their beard shaved or trimmed

Face should be cleaned and refreshed

This enhances comfort and personal dignity.

8. Cultural and Religious Sensitivity

Respecting patient cultural identity is an important element of patient-centred care.

Examples include:

Applying a bindi for Hindu female patients if desired

Respecting any religious or cultural preferences as permitted and appropriate

Such practices strengthen emotional well-being and cultural respect.

9. Spruce Up During Patient Transport

Patient transfer for investigations or procedures represents a highly visible moment of care delivery.

The protocol recommends the following safety and presentation measures:

Transport Safety

1. Ensure wheelchair safety belts are fastened
2. Ensure side rails are raised on stretchers or beds
3. Confirm patient positioning and comfort

Documentation Safety

1. Place the patient file in the wheelchair pocket
2. Avoid placing documents on the patient's lap

Footwear

- Ensure the patient is wearing slippers
- Privacy and Comfort
- Provide a shawl instead of a bedsheet or blanket
- Maintain patient privacy while moving through corridors and elevators
- Provide a scarf for tracheostomy patients
- These practices reinforce dignity and ensure safe patient movement.

Implementation Strategy

The successful implementation of the Spruce Up initiative requires the following organizational strategies:

1. Staff Training

Nurses should receive orientation on:

Patient dignity and presentation

Grooming techniques

Cultural sensitivity

Safe patient transport practices

2. Unit-Level Grooming Kits

Each nursing unit can maintain a Spruce Up kit, which may include:

Comb

Moisturizer

Lip balm

Mouthwash

Mild fragrance

Shawls

Hair ties

Disposable grooming supplies

3. Integration into Nursing Checklists

The Spruce Up protocol may be incorporated into:

Visiting hour preparation checklist

Pre-transport patient safety checklist

4. Leadership Reinforcement

Nursing leaders should encourage staff participation and monitor compliance through routine audits.

Discussion

The Spruce Up initiative highlights the importance of humanistic nursing care that goes beyond clinical treatment. While modern healthcare focuses heavily on technological interventions, the emotional and psychological aspects of patient care remain equally significant.

Research suggests that patient satisfaction is strongly influenced by visible signs of attentiveness and compassion. Cleanliness, grooming, and personal comfort contribute to the patient's perception of safety, respect, and dignity within healthcare settings.

Furthermore, patient appearance can influence family trust and confidence in healthcare providers. When relatives observe that their loved ones are clean, comfortable, and well cared for, it strengthens their perception of quality nursing care.

The Spruce Up initiative also promotes professional accountability among nurses by emphasizing ownership of patient presentation and experience.

Implications for Nursing Practice

The Spruce Up protocol offers several benefits for nursing practice:

1. Improved Patient Experience

Patients feel respected, valued, and comfortable.

2. Enhanced Patient Recovery

Cleanliness and comfort may contribute to psychological well-being and healing.

3. Strengthened Professional Image

A well-groomed patient reflects professionalism in nursing care.

4. Cultural Sensitivity

Incorporating cultural preferences supports patient-centered care.

5. Institutional Reputation

Visible patient care practices positively influence the reputation of healthcare institutions.

Conclusion

The Spruce Up initiative represents a simple yet impactful nursing-led intervention designed to enhance patient dignity, comfort, and perception of care. By incorporating structured grooming, hygiene maintenance, cultural sensitivity, and safe transport practices into routine nursing workflows, healthcare institutions can significantly improve patient experience and satisfaction.

Nurses play a critical role in shaping the visible aspects of patient care, and initiatives such as Spruce Up reinforce the importance of compassion, ownership, and professionalism in nursing practice. Integrating such protocols into hospital care systems can help promote holistic, patient-centered healthcare delivery.

References

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