

NORTHERN SYDNEY AREA HEALTH SERVICE

Comparison of the Current Bed Bathing Method with the Soft Towel Bed  
Bathing Method

Executive Summary

Prepared for

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## Introduction

The Soft Towel bed bath is the method of choice at several hospitals throughout Australia, including the Sydney Adventist Hospital and Burnside Hospital, Adelaide. The method utilises Dermalux Soft Towel Lotion, which is a mild natural oil-based lotion developed and manufactured in Australia. This lotion is thought to cleanse and refresh the skin whilst maintaining skin condition without dryness or irritation. Both the principal investigators of this study experienced the soft towel bed bath during recent periods of hospitalisation and considered that the method provided greater patient comfort and well being.

This study was undertaken at Royal North Shore Hospital, Northern Sydney Area Health Service. It was commenced in September 1996 and concluded in April 1997. The Dermalux solution was supplied by Whiteley Industries at no cost, as were the solution dispensers, videos, wall charts and letter of liability.

The impressions of 200 patients (both medical and surgical) and 200 nursing staff (registered, enrolled and trainee enrolled nurses) in relation to two (2) bed bathing methods were compared by means of questionnaires and semi structured interviews. Data regarding costs was obtained from appropriate cost centre managers.

## Aim

The aim of the study was to compare the Soft Towel Bed Bathing method with the current bed bathing method, focusing on:

- patient satisfaction
- nursing staff satisfaction/acceptance
- costs: labour/materials

## Data Collection Instruments

A patient questionnaire designed by the principal investigators, entailed seven questions relating to patient comfort, privacy, cleanliness, skin condition and warmth. Additional comments made by patients during the interview were noted by the research assistant and form the basis of the qualitative analysis.

Nursing staff were given similar questionnaires which they completed themselves. The eight questions related to learning and performing the method, the time taken to complete the method, patient feedback and cleanliness and skin condition.

Details of costings obtained by verbal discussion with relevant personnel within Royal North Shore Hospital and the Northern Sydney Area Health Service.

## Data Collection Procedure

The research assistant visited the participating wards each day and, after consultation with nursing staff, interviewed suitable patients who had undergone the designated bed bathing method that morning. The research assistant used the questionnaire as part of a semi-structured interview.

Information relating to patients such as their names or their conditions was not collected; however bed numbers and dates were recorded on the questionnaires themselves in order to avoid duplication. Before being bathed, patients received a handout outlining the aims of the study. Patient consent was a mixture of verbal and implied.

Nursing staff on the wards involved in the study received an inservice on the soft towel bed bathing method before commencing the study. Questionnaires were usually handed out individually and were completed whilst the patient interview was taking place. However due to the demands upon nursing staff time it was found that distributing questionnaires at morning tea time was a far more effective way of gathering information. Again, personal information was not solicited.

The study was carried out in two stages, each of three months duration. The wards were split into two groups, with one group administering the current bed bathing method and the other the soft towel bed bathing method. At the halfway point the two groups changed over, to avoid outcome bias in the results.

## **Overall Comment**

Both the quantitative and qualitative analysis suggest a general acceptance of the benefits of the soft towel bathing method as opposed to the current bed bathing method, by both patients and nursing staff. In addition, the research team observed throughout the project a steady increase in nursing staff enthusiasm for the project. Given that resistance to change is often high amongst nursing staff, it was both surprising and heartening to see that nursing staff embraced the new method and expressed a desire to continue to use it once the study had been completed.

## **Patient's Impressions**

An analysis of key words patients used to describe their overall impressions of the bed bathing method they received reveals that patients receiving the soft towel bed bathing method most commonly used the words "good", "felt better", "refreshing" and "relaxing". Patients receiving the current bed bathing method used "good", "refreshing" or "all right" most often. Patient enthusiasm for the soft towel bed bathing method was far more unreserved and enthusiastic, while current bed bath bathing patients frequently qualified their enthusiasm or were not enthusiastic at all.

## **Nurses' Impressions**

Nurses found the soft towel bed bathing method easier to perform than other methods, including the current bed bathing method bath, saying that it decreased the amount of mess made, was more pleasant for both patients and nurses, and had a soothing and relaxing effect. The current bed bathing method, in comparison, was more likely to be seen as less cleansing for a patient, not as good as a shower or a soft towel bed bath and more stressful for a patient than other methods.

The soft towel bed bathing method was seen as easy to learn, or easy to pick up by observing other nurses performing the procedure.

## Costing

	Soft Towel	Current Method
Solution/ Soap	\$0.17	nil
Water	0.14c	0.42c
Electricity	nil	nil
Laundry	\$0.51	\$0.34
Waste	n/a	n/a
Labour	\$2.02	\$3.03
Total Per Bath:	\$2.84	\$3.79
Five Baths Per Day:	\$14.20	\$18.95
Total Per Year:	\$5,183.00	\$6,916.75

The above analysis was based on a ward where a minimum of five bed baths per day are carried out. In reality some wards (such as orthopaedics) carry out far more than five bed baths per day, while other wards (such as a six bed coronary care ward) will perform far fewer bed baths.

In terms of heating costs and so on, electricity is regarded by hospital cost centres as a nil cost, as the boilers are constantly running, meaning that it costs nothing (effectively) to heat water on the wards. Figures for labour are based on the average of the wages of third year registered nurses, second year enrolled nurses and trainee enrolled nurses, as well as the time taken to perform the bed bathing method.

The establishment cost for the soft towel bed bathing method is \$34.13 per set of equipment which includes: a 12 inch red spirit thermometer; one three (3) litre plastic jug; and, a bundle of fifty (50) polythene bags (600mm x 280mm x 50um).

Final analysis revealed that the soft towel bed bathing method has the potential for substantial cost savings, in the region of twenty five percent per year. This is in line with the figures quoted by the American study of Carruth and others (1995).

## Recommendations

Due to the positive outcome of the study findings in relation to the soft towel bed bathing method , the researchers make the following recommendations:

- area wide adoption of the soft towel bed bathing method
- area wide information sharing sessions regarding study findings
- area wide education programme to support change to and implementation of the soft towel bed bathing method.
- initiate negotiations with Whitely Chemicals for educational support

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3 November, 1997.