

PROVIDING DIGNIFIED BATHING FOR THE BARIATRIC PATIENT- SPHM PROGRAM INTEGRATION

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As the population of the United States becomes heavier, the impact of providing care for patients of size is being felt all across the health care continuum. In 2021, 19 of the 50 states in the US were identified as having populations that are more than 35% obese,¹ adding to the challenges health care providers already have in meeting the needs of this specific patient population.

As well as the physical difficulties associated with turning, repositioning, transferring, and mobilizing patients of size, there is also the need for clinical staff to provide care with a sense of dignity and empathy. Many overweight patients have spent much of their lives being teased about their weight. Their sensitivities and embarrassment lead them to delay even seeking out health care services. When they do eventually receive them, their diseases are often in a more advanced state and the care they require, more complex.²

Concurrently, the incidence of musculoskeletal injuries seen in caregivers providing even the most fundamental aspects of patient care is increasing.³ Many health care facilities are not sufficiently prepared with either appropriate technology to prevent these injuries, adequate staffing to avoid work overload and fatigue, or the provision of staff education to adequately care for this group of patients that is often perceived as having special needs.⁴ Even those facilities that have lifting equipment are likely to have purchased it without thinking of the growing need for technology that can be used on patients who exceed the existing weight limits.

Bariatric patients are susceptible to many physical illnesses or diseases, including the complications of immobility such as breathing and circulatory issues.⁵ Also, bariatric patients are far more vulnerable to skin issues, which are often present on admission due to the individual's own challenges with bathing in his or her home environment.

To maintain the skin integrity of an obese person, it is usually suggested that they shower daily to prevent the complications associated with skinfolds, which may develop behind the neck, under the arms, breasts, and abdomen, between the inner thighs, and under the pannus.^{6,7} However, in acute care areas particularly, this is often not carried out due to a lack of bathing facilities and staff to carry out the task, as well as the fact that patients pass through acute areas into rehabilitation units fairly quickly. If not prevented, though, skin complications can include candidiasis, intertriginous dermatitis, and pressure ulcers,⁶ the latter of which may be caused by IVs or other types of catheters if the individual has them while in hospital or in another type of facility. The skin can also be susceptible to shearing force as it sticks to itself.⁸

Excluding the option of a patient being able to bathe his-or-herself, there are 4 other options for bathing in a health care facility: bed bath, bathtub, shower, and shower trolley, the advantages and disadvantages of which are identified in Table 1. It should be remembered that while any or all of the options are available to an able-bodied person, a patient of size, with the associated restrictions on his or her mobility, may have difficulty with one or more of them.

However, it is not just the selection of the right bathing option that is important. The patient's dignity is equally significant. Healthcare professionals often underestimate the level of vulnerability felt by a patient who is about to be fully exposed to them. When dignity is absent from care, those receiving it feel devalued, lacking control and comfort.⁹ But, as mentioned earlier, there is a need for staff to be educated in caring for patients of size. A study conducted in 2 intensive care units in 2018¹⁰ showed that there was frustration among nurses relating to the physically-demanding care situations and an unwillingness to care for bariatric patients among some colleagues. Acute care nurses have also been shown to hold bias against patients of size.¹¹ It should always be remembered that when being bathed, a patient is exposing their body to a person he or she does not know, and there may also be issues with cultural beliefs. Empathy is one of the most valuable qualities a caregiver can have. The "How would I feel?" question should be asked at every step by a caregiver when providing care to patients.



Figure 1: The TR4000 Shower Trolley

TABLE 1: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF 4 BATHING OPTIONS

BATHING OPTION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<p>Bed Bath (Sponge Bath)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient does not need to be moved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not clean the patient well • Difficult to wash patient's hair • Can be very time consuming and engages 2 caregivers. • Limbs need to be lifted individually to be cleaned and then dried (high risk static load)
<p>Bathtub</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soothing & therapeutic for the patient • May be height adjustable to avoid staff leaning over at a low height • Sense of normalcy for the patient • Ideal for soaking off dirt, bacteria, and dead skin • Easy to clean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need a specific lift to get in and out of the bath, so adding to expense • Need a special lift to get patient in and out if they are not independent • Many baths are not height-adjustable • Patient may not feel comfortable or secure should they need to be lifted in and out of the bathtub
<p>Shower</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient gets cleaner with running water • Easy to wash hair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor ergonomic position for caregiver unless shower chair is height-adjustable • Non-height adjustable if fixed shower seat not built for the bariatric patient • Caregiver may rush due to fear of slipping on the wet floor • Messy • Cannot reach all the patient areas easily or under skin folds while also holding the shower head • Difficult to check all pressure areas while patient is sitting down • If immobile or weak on legs will need a lift to transfer on and off the shower chair
<p>Shower Trolley</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean running water • Easy to wash hair without getting water in patients eyes • Can be converted to a bath for soaking off dressings • Water is contained through a drainage system, so floor is drier and less risk of caregiver slipping • Patient is supported by the sides of the shower trolley, so feels safe • Easier to clean under legs and arms • Greater access to areas under skin folds due to patient's lateral or semi-recumbent position • Easier to roll patient (if shower trolley wide enough) • Easier to check all pressure areas and skin for bruising, skin tears • Easier to dry and dress patient • Can redress wounds while patient is on the trolley and apply creams and other treatments • Can transfer from bed to trolley using a lift or slide board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ergonomic risk to caregiver if not height-adjustable • May not be wide enough to roll the patient • May be too wide for the doorway, especially in older buildings. • May be uncomfortable for the patient. • Often requires wedges or bolsters to provide support and comfort for the patient

When based on the advantages and disadvantages of bed bathing, it seems clear that, for a patient of size who has poor mobility, a shower trolley is the best option. Therefore, when purchasing a shower trolley as part of a safe patient handling program, the criteria should include those seen in Table 2:

TABLE 2: CRITERIA FOR PURCHASING A SHOWER TROLLEY

- Has a weight limit that can accommodate all types of patients/residents
- Allows the dignity of the patient to be maintained
- Is easy to use, clean, mobilize, and store
- Is height-adjustable
- Is wide enough to turn the patient for skin checks and washing of all areas and provide a manageable workspace for the caregiver
- Fits through existing doorways
- Is easy to maneuver
- Is comfortable for the patient, with head and body support
- Has a chargeable or powered option
- Is intuitive to use
- Makes the patient feel secure that he or she will not roll off the trolley
- Can accommodate tall people
- Can hold water to create an environment for soaking dressings
- Can be used in a variety of clinical settings
- Has pillow options to promote comfort of the patient
- Has a drainage system that avoids flooding the bathroom floor to ensure safety for caregiver and patient.
- Integrates with other technologies to prevent MSDs to clinical staff
- Is cost effective

While there are a variety of options for shower chairs and fewer for shower trolleys, the TR4000 shower trolley is the only one available that meets all these requirements cited above (Figure 1). Not only does it have the highest working-load limit at 1000 lb (450 kg), but it also has the widest working width at more than 30 inches. When talking to health care professionals who use this shower trolley, they state that its width has made it very suitable for many other patient groups, including those who have experienced spinal cord injury; nursing home residents who are not mobile enough to be able to use a shower chair/seat or sit for more than a few minutes; brain injury patients; patients with neurological diseases such as Huntington's; patients who are unable to follow simple instructions, such as those with dementia; patients who have suffered extensive burns and are intubated or immobile; and patients whose body shape is more rotund. The wider working width allows patients to be rolled onto their side without the fear of falling off the side. Users from LTACs, long term care, rehabilitation, and acute care have also suggested that the TR4000 can be used as part of a decontamination process for the homeless in the ER, as well as a changing table in a physical therapy department. The ability of the TR4000 to go straight into the Trendelenburg position is a reassuring option for the provider.

This shower trolley provides a normalcy for the bariatric patient in the continuum of patient care and patient safety. The patient can be laterally transferred from the bed to the shower trolley using a slide board or an overhead lift, and then, after a shower, and any treatments, and/or being dressed while still on the shower trolley, can be transferred back to the bed the same way or transferred to a wheelchair with a mobile floor-based lift.

When using the TR4000, the patient can maintain some control over the procedure or assist



Figure 2: Maintaining dignity during the shower

the caregiver, with communication between the two parties being easy. It also makes it easier to cover the area of the body that is not being cleaned by a towel, thus preserving the respect and dignity of the patient as much as is possible (Figure 2).

In conclusion, the provision of dignified care for the patient of size is crucial, and nothing is more challenging than providing safe and respectful care. The TR4000 meets all the criteria for patient-focused care during bathing and, more specifically, showering. It is also a cost-effective device that can be used to shower, transport, and treat the patient.

The width of the TR4000 shower trolley provides a viable workspace for the caregiver to shower and assess their patient in a safe environment. Also, having the highest weight limit in this technology group makes it a perfect fit in acute care, rehabilitation, and long term care facilities, thus avoiding the need to purchase an additional shower trolley for regular-sized patients.

If health care facilities do not provide this, they are likely to suffer financially, because patients with Medicare or health insurance have choices regarding where they can receive their care and, as the population becomes larger, the expectations of this patient population will grow. As Gallagher stated in 2015 ⁽⁵⁾, “At what point do we recognize this is the patient population, not a special population, and then address SPHM opportunities in caring for a special patient population who also happens to be obese?”

“With the TR4000 you get the simplicity and the durability at the same time.” -Anonymous

“The TR4000 is a comfortable, safe place for our more dependent residents.” - M. Reilly, Black Mountain Neuro-Medical Treatment Center

“It is the width not the weight limit that makes it easier to shower the wider patients.” -Anonymous

“The shower trolley has added a different level of assistance for our patients to be able to feel clean. We enjoy using it.” -Anonymous

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