

Video: Dignity of risk



Transcript

Duty of Care is about limiting people's risk and protecting them from harm. Dignity of risk, however, means allowing people to make choices that aren't always in their best interests. It's a tricky area and one that's not often well defined in the industry. Dignity of risk refers to the rights of all adults to make decisions about their life, even if those decisions are not in their best interests. Dignity of risk gives residents the right to make informed choices about their health and their care, even if you, their family or other professionals don't agree with what they are doing. If a person decides to smoke despite being warned of their health impacts they have the right to do so. As do older people have the right to refuse food, treatment or certain activities if they have made an informed choice to do so.

Dignity of risk lies at the heart of person-centred care. It's about supporting people to make the best decisions for themselves and their situation. For instance, if an ill resident is adamant they don't want a certain treatment you would attempt to find an alternative or provide increased care and support to carry them through their illness. If they refuse or recommend a diet such as those designed for diabetics you might monitor their existing regimen more closely and implement procedures for dealing with adverse outcomes. Often people's choices around risk can be granted in small ways. If they're scheduled to have a bath but don't want one you could offer a quick flannel wash instead and spend your time with them doing other things. If they don't want the full meal that's being prepared, offer soup and toast instead or suggest they eat at a later time.

Respecting people's dignity of risk isn't always easy but by developing the flexibility to think around such issues you can better inform your future practice. One of the hardest tasks for a support worker can be finding a balance between honouring a resident's dignity of risk and maintaining your duty of care to them. Your job is not to wrap your residents in cotton wool nor abandon them to make decisions uninformed, all you can do is make sure they understand the nature of the risk they're considering and its implications for their wellbeing.