

Video: Dignity of risk



Transcript

This section covers two intertwined topics duty of care and dignity of risk. In short 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. In this video, we'll start with the duty of care then talk about how these seemingly contradictory ideas can be resolved.

When delivering a service to your residence you must meet your duty of care requirements at all times. Unfortunately, there's no legal definition for what constitutes a duty of care but it's usually taken to mean you must always conduct yourself in a reasonable manner, in a way that fits your position. In aged care it means using your role to protect and uphold older people's rights to health safety dignity confidentiality and self-determination of your residents. If you maintain a professional approach with your organization and residents and stick to the principles of person-centered care there's a good chance you'll maintain your duty of care.

A duty of care is breached when someone doesn't provide an adequate level of care meaning they do something they shouldn't or they fail to do something they should. It's often linked to negligence but in reality duty of care covers five important areas your legal responsibilities your professional and ethical responsibilities your responsibility to your employer and your responsibility to both your community and yourself.

Maintaining a duty of care is a balancing act and requires anticipating potential risks and preventing them before they become a problem. Note though that your duty of care isn't just your residence it extends to your employer and other agencies it even extends to people you've never met.

If you do something that poses a danger to the wider community it may be considered a breach of your duty of care. Likewise, if you place your co-workers or employer at risk you might be breaching your duty of care also. Your organization's policies and procedures should clearly describe your duty of care to yourself and others and outline how you should perform it. These policies will vary depending on where you're working but they'll generally ensure that all staff receives appropriate and relevant training. They'll also encourage staff residents and the rest of the support team to work through any duty of care issues together.

If you have an issue relating to duty of care such as a conflict between your responsibility to your resident and to your employer discuss it with your manager or supervisor. It's important to handle these things quickly and efficiently to minimize any current or future risk.

So what about dignity of risk? As mentioned earlier it's somewhat entangled with duty of care, and while these two seem like opposing ideas they're both there to protect and serve the right of your residence. 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 give 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 the health impacts they have the right to do so, as too, 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-centered 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 a recommended 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 are scheduled to have a bath but don't want one you could offer a quick flannel wash and stand and spend your time with them doing other things. If they don't want the full meal that's been 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 honoring a residents dignity of risk and maintaining your duty of care to them. Your job is not to wrap your residence 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 well-being.

If possible have them collaborate with members of their support team so that issues can be worked through together, and joint decisions made.

The conflict between duty of care and dignity of risk, highlights the incredible importance of having an individualized plan that reflects each residence wishes that way policies and decisions are made unambiguous and documented in writing and the entire support team can be kept informed and up-to-date.