

Supporting Sexual Health and Intimacy in Long-term Care Homes, Assisted Living, Group Homes, Supported Housing

Site Applicability

VCH and PHC Sites:

- Long Term Care
- Assisted Living
- Group Homes
- Supported Housing

Practice Level

- All regulated staff in their respective scope of practice.
- All unregulated staff under the supervision and direction of a regulated health care professional.

Competency Guidance:

- In order to achieve competency in this guideline:
 - 1) Review this DST
 - 2) Review [Risk of Harm and Supporting Choices DST](#)
 - 3) Contact local leadership for additional support as needed

Requirements

VCH and PHC Nurses and all other Interdisciplinary Care Team members will follow the Decision Support Tool (DST) [Pocket Guide \(See Appendix A\)](#) when providing care -planning support for sexual health and intimacy. Please also see The Guidelines full version ([Appendix B](#)). This longer version of the Guidelines, that the Pocket Guide is based on, provides further direction. To be utilized as needed.

Need to Know

The term 'person' or 'people' will be used to describe individuals connected to VCH and PHC who are living in long term care homes, assisted living, group homes and supported housing, commonly referred to as resident, client or patient.

Sexual health and intimacy are essential components of overall health. Moving into a long term care home or other supported care should not, in and of itself, equate to losing the opportunity to engage in intimate and sexual behaviors. In the past, sexual health and intimacy of people in long term care has not been formally supported in practice. People can, but do not necessarily, present with unique clinical circumstances including: varying degrees of cognitive impairment and potential related disinhibition that can impact decision making; age related health concerns that can impact sexual activity; and physical mobility impairment. Long term care homes, assisted living, group homes and other supported housing

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sites have ethical and legal obligations to recognize, respect, and support peoples' sexual lives while optimizing the overall health and safety of all people.

Guideline

The Document [‘Supporting Sexual Health and Intimacy in Long Term Care Homes: A Pocket Reference Guide \(Pocket Guide\)’](#) provides detailed guidance on how to assess and address issues related to sexual health and intimacy. The Pocket Guide provides a decision making tool and supporting ethical, legal and clinical rationale, for assessment and implementation in care planning. Case studies are provided to guide clinicians on the process.

An interdisciplinary team based approach will be utilized wherever possible. The person and appropriate members of their circle of care would be included where appropriate in the care planning, as early and as often as possible.

If any member of the care team has questions or concerns regarding implementation of the sexual health guidelines, they are encouraged to seek assistance from local site administration or Ethics Services.

Documentation

- Follow site specific documentation and practice specific standards
- Develop a care plan for every person
 - Refer to [Appendix C](#) for checklist to provide guidance in care planning

Expected Outcome

People living in long term care homes, assisted living, group homes and supported housing will be supported with regards to sexual health, sexual expression and intimacy needs, including sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Their autonomy and dignity in this area of health will be considered in care planning as an integral aspect of their overall health and well-being. Care will be taken to balance the well-being of individual people while recognizing and reducing risks for others in a long term care home or supported housing setting.

Note: Relevance to other care situations:

Application of ethical principles is context-specific and unique circumstances and individual differences may result in differing application in other care settings. As such, those responsible for the health and safety of people in other care situations may choose to utilize the direction in this document to address their site specific considerations. Adapted from: page 1: ‘COVID-19 Ethics Analysis: Intervening When Patients or Residents Pose a Risk of COVID-19 Transmission to Others’, from the BCMHS June 23, 2020.¹

Related Documents

VCH Ethics Services:

- [My VCH Ethics services](#)

¹ For assistance regarding how to apply ethical principles in care-planning, please contact Ethics Services and/or Professional Practice.

- [VCH Ethics Services](#)

VCH Patient Quality and Risk Management

- [Client Relations and Risk Management](#)

PHC Ethics Services:

- [Client Relations Service](#)
- [PHC Ethics Services](#)
- [Risk Management](#)

Trans Care BC PHSA

- [Improving gender-affirming care across BC](#)

BCCNP

- [Boundaries in the Nurse-Client Relationship](#)
- [Ethical Practice](#)

Learning Hub

- [Tips for Breaking the Ice: Sexual Health](#)
- [BCMHSUS Gender Affirming Care](#)
- [BCMHSUS Sexual Health Guidelines for Patients and Clients](#)
- VCH Prism Services LGBTQ+ Education Series:
 - [Prism Services](#)
 - [Transgender Inclusion 101](#)

Cultural Safety

- [VCH Indigenous Cultural Safety Policy](#)
- [VCH Cultural Competency and Responsiveness](#)
- [PHC Cultural Competency Policy](#)

BCPMH & VCH Trauma Informed Care

- [Trauma Informed Practice Guide \(BC Provincial Ministry of Health\)](#)
- [VCH DST on Trauma Informed Practice](#)

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3. British Columbia Ministry of Health: COVID-19 Ethics Analysis: Intervening When Patients or Residents Pose a Risk of COVID-19 Transmission to Others(June 23, 2020)

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Appendix

- **Appendix A:** [Supporting Sexual Health and Intimacy in Long Term Care Homes: A Pocket Reference Guide](#)
- **Appendix B:** [Original Full Guidelines document: 2009](#)
2009 International literature search available on request
- **Appendix C:** [Checklist for Care Planning related to Sexual Health and Intimacy](#)

Appendix C: Checklist for Care Planning related to Sexual Health and Intimacy

This checklist is suggested for use to support the care planning process.

Documentation for Care Planning related to Sexual Health and Intimacy in Long Term Care Homes, Assisted Living, Group Homes, and Supported Housing Documentation of the decision making process and care planning should be robust and clear and shared with the person or SDM (if applicable) while upholding VCH/PHC Privacy Policy. Additional information should be documented in the progress notes or equivalent. Documentation should at minimum include the following:	
Date and Time of Discussion(s)	
Who was involved or present, including person(s) in care involved and, if applicable, Substitute Decision Maker (SDM)	
Brief description of choice e.g. Two persons in care request to have private time together for sexual activity	
If choice poses a risk: a) To self (person) b) To others c) To both self (person) and others	
Is the person: a) Capable of making the choice to engage in sexual/intimate activity? b) Not Capable of making the choice to engage in sexual/intimate activity? c) If applicable state date of formal capability assessment and by whom. d) If applicable list issues related to the persons' ability to consent to engage in sexual/ intimate activity to assist in the care team's assessment & decision-making.	
Interventions offered if person capable: Interventions implemented in the person's best interest if person not capable:	
HCP responsible for follow-up:	

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	Endorsed By: Professional Practice Standards Committee	Endorsed By: (Regional SharePoint 2nd Reading) Health Authority Profession Specific Advisory Council Chairs (HAPSAC) Health Authority and Area Specific Inter professional Advisory Council Chairs (HAIAAC) Operations Directors Professional Practice Directors Final Sign Off: Vice President, Professional Practice and Chief Clinical Information Officer, VCH
Owners: <i>(optional)</i>	PHC	VCH
	Development Team Lead(s): Sexual Health Clinician, Sexual Health Rehab Service, GF Strong Site Development Team Member(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical Nurse Leader, Holy Family Hospital Residence, • Clinical Ethicist • Social Work Site Leader - Mount St. Joseph and Holy Family Hospital; Research, Education and Practice Coordinator, Social Work • Patient Voices Network • Site Leader; Long-Term Care, Social Work • Physician Ethicist 	Development Team Lead(s): Sexual Health Clinician, Sexual Health Rehab Service, GF Strong Site Development Team Member(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethicist, • Clinical Nurse Specialist, Tertiary Mental Health • Clinical Care Coordinator Berkeley Dementia Care Centre, North Shore • Clinical Care Coordinator, Lynn Valley Care Centre, North Vancouver • Director Lynn Valley Care Centre • Clinical Nurse Educator, Minoru Residence, Richmond

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdisciplinary Long Term Care Team, • Spiritual Care Practitioner George Pearson Centre • Ethicist • Care Home Consultant • Clinical Practice Leader, Interdisciplinary Long-Term Care Team • Member Seniors Advisory Council for Seniors Advocate of BC
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