

# Chapter 25

## Assisting With Pressure Ulcers

# Important Terms

- Bony prominence—an area where the bone sticks out or projects from the flat surface of the body. The back of the hand, shoulder blades, elbows, hips, spine, sacrum, knees, ankles, heels, and toes are bony prominence. These areas also are called pressure points.
- Shear—when layers of the skin rub against each other. Or shear is when the skin remains in place and underlying tissues move and stretch and tear underlying capillaries and blood vessels. Tissue damage occurs.
- Friction—the rubbing of one surface against another. The skin is dragged across a surface.
  - Friction is always present with shearing.

# Pressure Ulcers

- The National Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel defines pressure ulcer as any lesion caused by unrelieved pressure that results in damage to underlying tissues.
  - According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), friction and shear are not the main causes of pressure ulcers.
  - However, friction and shear are important contributing factors.

# Pressure Ulcers, cont'd.

- Pressure, shearing, and friction are causes of skin breakdown and pressure ulcers.
- Risk factors include:
  - Breaks in the skin
  - Poor circulation to an area
  - Moisture
  - Dry skin
  - Irritation by urine and feces
  - Being older and disabled

# Pressure Ulcers, cont'd.

- Pressure occurs when the skin over a bony area is squeezed between hard surfaces.
- Friction scrapes the skin, causing an open area.
- Shearing is when the skin sticks to a surface while deeper tissues move downward.
  - This occurs when the person slides down in the bed or chair.

# Persons at Risk

- Persons at risk for pressure ulcers are those who:
  - Are bedfast or chairfast
  - Need some or total help in moving
  - Are agitated or have involuntary muscle movements
  - Have loss of bowel or bladder control
  - Are exposed to moisture
  - Have poor nutrition or poor fluid balance
  - Have lowered mental awareness
  - Have problems sensing pain or pressure
  - Have circulatory problems
  - Are older, obese, or very thin

# Pressure Ulcer Stages

- In persons with light skin, a reddened bony area is the first sign of a pressure ulcer.
- In persons with dark skin, skin color may differ from surrounding areas.
- Skin color change remains after the pressure is relieved.
- The area may feel warm or cool.
- The person may complain of pain, burning, tingling, or itching in the area.
  - Some people do not feel anything unusual.

# Pressure Ulcer Sites

- Pressure ulcers usually occur over bony areas called pressure points.
- Pressure on the ears can occur.
- In obese people, common pressure ulcer sites include:
  - Between abdominal folds
  - Between the legs
  - Between the buttocks
  - Between the thighs
  - Under the breasts



# Prevention and Treatment

- Good nursing care, cleanliness, and skin care are essential.
- Follow the person's care plan.
- The person at risk is placed on a surface that reduces or relieves pressure.
- The doctor orders:
  - Wound care products
  - Drugs
  - Treatments
  - Special equipment to promote healing
- The nurse and care plan tell you what to do.

# Protective Devices

- The following protective devices are often used:
  - A bed cradle
  - Heel and elbow protectors
  - Heel and foot elevators
  - Gel or fluid-filled pads and cushions
  - Eggcrate-type pads
  - Special beds
  - Pillows, trochanter rolls, foot-boards, and other positioning devices

# Complications

- Infection is the most common complication.
- Osteomyelitis is a risk if the pressure ulcer is over a bony prominence.
- Pressure ulcers can cause pain.
- Immobility is a risk factor for pressure ulcers.