



The Kennedy Terminal Ulcer-a Sign to Caregivers

As we know, pressure ulcer management is an essential part of excellent nursing care. Because this care is complex and complicated depending on where the body is in the healing process, it is necessary to understand that there is evidence that some manifested pressure ulcers may be indicative of an impending death. The Kennedy Terminal Ulcer, named after the nurse who discovered it, Karen Lou Kennedy-Evans, is an identified type of skin breakdown that almost always leads to a quick death for a resident or patient.

The characteristics of these ulcers are as follows:

1. They come on quickly. A routine body check at noon may not show one, and then by three, a new ulcer appears.
2. The ulcers are generally superficial, but grow in depth and size rapidly.
3. They are most often found on the sacrum.
4. They are most often found in the geriatric population.
5. They are often pear shaped.
6. Death usually occurs within 8-24 hours of identification.

Understanding this phenomena is important for comprehensive care planning and overall management of the resident's or patient's needs. Treatment for a Kennedy Terminal Ulcer is the same as for any other pressure ulcer; however, care planning for the treatment might take a different approach. Because the ulcer is often a sign of death, the care plan and nursing notes can begin to reflect the resident's or patient's last wishes, last measures for comfort and last contacts to necessary family for preparation.

This documentation can be critical during a survey process. Without such language in the chart, a surveyor might find it unusual that the resident or patient developed a large ulcer so quickly, and it may even appear that the facility staff did not take appropriate steps to prevent breakdown. Because skin breakdown is a key measure of quality of care, it is absolutely necessary that all documentation to support inevitable skin breakdown accompanied with support that the breakdown might actually be related to the active dying process can make all of the difference in how a surveyor interprets staff actions and delivery and quality of care.

To find out more about the Kennedy Terminal Ulcer, go to www.kennedyterminalulcer.com.