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Continence Care: The Need for Creativity and Innovation

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Continence Care: The Need for Creativity and Innovation

In April 2007, I attended a conference quite different from anything I had previously experienced. The conference, *Innovating for Continence: The Engineering Challenge*, was hosted by the Simon Foundation for Continence. As the title implies, this was not your usual conference about the diagnosis, treatment, and management of urinary incontinence. Rather, it was a conference dedicated to exploring technological advances in continence care. The central question throughout this two-and-a-half day event was, "What can be done to stimulate continence technology to ensure the most effective management for persons who suffer with this problem?"

The conference attracted an international audience of nearly 150 attendees, including health care providers (physicians and nurses), academic and industry engineers, corporate executives, organizational leaders of professional and lay non-profit groups (including SUNA), as well as caregivers and clients. What was so amazing about this gathering of people was the collective interest in examining the problem of urinary incontinence from an entirely different point-of-view. As participants, we were continually challenged to think outside the box. Could technologies developed for space programs or other medical specialties be re-envisioned and adapted for use in continence care? Could advances in odor science or textile engineering improve continence management? Is there any way to create a female collection device that might actually work?

Any doubts one might have had about the need to accelerate development and advance technologies for continence care were diminished by the poignant stories of caregivers and clients about their difficulties in managing urinary incontinence. While behavioral strategies were appropriately utilized as a primary approach to managing incontinence, many admitted that behavioral interventions alone were often not enough to assure effective and confident continence care. Products or devices were frequently used as compliments to create a comprehensive approach to



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care, but often, what worked for one person was not effective for another. The pleas for creativity and innovation in continence management were heartfelt and could not be ignored.

Creativity is a core human drive that all individuals possess to some degree. The problem is that we often become so comfortable within our areas of expertise that we resist the opportunity to consider ideas outside of the proverbial box we have created for ourselves. Some believe that we are cursed by the knowledge that propels us down the path of tried and true approaches when confronted with a chal-

lenge (Rae-Dupree, 2007). Our comfort in what we already know allows us to solve the problem or accomplish the task, but often at the expense of stifling creativity.

Creative thinking leads to innovation. Yet, the ability to think creatively takes practice. According to Ditkoff (2007), some ways that you can stimulate creative thinking may include brainstorming daily with a coworker, identifying three alternatives to every solution you originate, asking five people how they might improve your idea, creating an idea piggy bank and making deposits daily, attempting to make connections between seemingly disconnected things, and simply choosing to be more creative. But let's face it, being creative can be hard work, and most people would just prefer to wait for someone else to think up the next great idea to better solve the problem.

We cannot advance continence care without the collective, creative ideas of knowledgeable individuals from diverse backgrounds. We must also engage in a continuing dialogue to identify a common ground from which to generate new solutions to old problems. Above all, innovation for continence needs the commitment of people with a variety of skills who are willing to share new ideas, embrace innovation, and promote change. This is a tall

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Editorial

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request, but I am certain that there is someone reading this editorial who has a clever idea for continence management worth sharing. If that person is you, mark your calendar now to attend the next Innovating for Continence conference scheduled for April 6-8, 2009. ■

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