

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) buttons - providing dignity in care

The challenge

As part of its commitment to the Dignity Challenge, Nottingham City Council was looking for a solution to tackle the issue of residents in specialist dementia units wearing each other's clothing.

The Dignity in Care Campaign, launched by Ivan Lewis MP, the Minister for Care Services, aims to eliminate tolerance of indignity in health and social care services through raising awareness and inspiring people to take action. Part of the campaign is the Dignity Challenge which has ten key areas that high quality services should adhere to. More information is available at www.dignityincare.co.uk

A person's clothes are part of an individual's identity, and many older people take pride in their appearance. Unfortunately the ability to choose what to wear can become more of a problem for people with dementia. Lapses in memory can result in people not being able to identify their own clothing and because clothing from several residents is washed together, it can be a significant problem. This often results in a collection of anonymous clothing and there is the cost of replacements.

Nottingham needed a solution that would help residents to remain independent, help them maintain their identity and to promote dignity in care.

“As we continue to develop services for residents in our Care Homes for Older People, managers are constantly looking to promote, improve and maintain standards around person-centred care. The RFID buttons will help us to ensure that we meet those standards by being able to care for residents' clothes according to their individual wishes. It will also assist in ensuring that residents' clothes are easily identified and with their rightful owner.

Paul Haigh, Business Manager for Residential Care, Nottingham City Council



**Nottingham
City Council**

Tunstall

The project

Dignity for residents

Laura Chambers Lodge has been a Specialist Dementia Unit since 2001 and is one of 3 units across Nottingham. Tunstall approached Nottingham City Council about the idea of using Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) buttons to tackle the clothing-related problem.

Before the introduction of the buttons some residents resorted to writing their names inside their clothing in felt pen or even sewing in name tags. The pen often comes off in the wash, it damages and defaces the clothing, and both of these techniques are undignified for older people.

Seeing someone else dressed in their clothing can also be very distressing for residents and can add to their confusion. Families often want to make sure their relatives are comfortable and nice clothing is a common gift. To see someone else wearing clothing they have purchased for their relative is upsetting and can be a major cause for concern about the level of care the individual is receiving.

The buttons are easily attached to clothing and each can be programmed to store up to 200 characters. This can include the person's name, unit, room number and any other information that they may wish to keep private. Some residents may have the MRSA infection which requires that their clothing be washed separately from others. Skin-related issues, such as eczema or an allergy to biological washing powder can be also included on the button. Members of staff do not need to keep asking residents for this information which maintains the resident's dignity and their privacy. Each button is reusable and can be easily reprogrammed if there is a change in a resident's circumstances.



Kate Fisher, Project Officer for Dementia, Nottingham City Council and Stephanie Wilkinson, Centre Manager, Laura Chambers Lodge

Sheila James, Laundress, Laura Chambers Lodge



An innovative approach

Nottingham City Council is the first local authority in the country to use the RFID buttons to manage this problem. The small unobtrusive buttons are designed to be easy to install but difficult to remove, so they cannot be taken off by accident and will not come off in the wash. The buttons are attached to each piece of clothing in a discreet position to avoid curiosity and they are very durable. Each resident has buttons created unique to them, providing a personalised level of care.

Programming and scanning the buttons is performed by a mobile hand-held reader, which allows staff to quickly identify an individual item of clothing. The buttons can be attached to any piece of clothing or personal effect that can be washed, such as slippers, hats, comfort cushions, stuffed toys and a laundry bag for delicate items too small for a button.

Introducing the technology

Residents, families and carers were consulted before the project began and all were in favour of the new approach to tackle the problem. The buttons will be gradually introduced to all residents living in specialist dementia units in Nottingham, which includes residents who visit for short-term care. As the buttons can be quickly removed with specialist equipment, they can either be taken off when a short-term resident returns home, or left on as they are very discrete.

Ten members of staff including domestic staff and carers were proficiently trained in a couple of hours on how to use and fit the buttons. An initial set of buttons was provided for residents at Laura Chambers Lodge and they are gradually being introduced to residents' clothing at their invitation. As the buttons are pre-programmed, the laundress, Sheila James, can fit several buttons in a few minutes with the resident in the room. Belongings do not need to be taken away which could also be distressing for the resident.

This face to face contact also gives Sheila another opportunity to remind the residents what she is doing and why, so they are not surprised if they find the buttons at a later date.



Durable Radio Frequency Identification Buttons

Programming and scanning the buttons is performed by a mobile hand-held reader

Results

Clothing from several residents is washed together and individual items are then ironed, scanned and separated, ensuring each resident receives their own clothing. This prevents the needs for sewn-in labels and writing in pen on the clothing.

The buttons provide residents with a number of benefits:

- Promotes individuality, dignity, choice and privacy
- Provides them with reassurance that the clothing they receive will be their own helping to preserve their identity
- Overall reduction in anxiety and stress

Residents have been involved with the project since the beginning and they have all been very positive about the initiative and think it is a good idea.

Benefits for members of staff include:

- The ability to quickly and easily identify a piece of clothing
- The elimination of anonymous clothing and the cost of replacement clothing
- More time to focus on caring for residents instead of searching for clothing

Families are also reassured that their relative is receiving a personalised level of care and that they are being treated as an individual which is another important aspect of the Dignity Challenge. Now that the buttons have been introduced another update will be sent to families and carers to keep them informed of its success. By regularly engaging with family members and carers Nottingham City Council is making them part of the care process.

Award winning technology

Nottingham City Council was the first authority in the UK to use RFID technology to support people with dementia and as a result was the recipient of a Health and Social Care Award for Innovation in Technology.



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For further information please call 01977 660479

t: 01977 661234
f: 01977 662570
e: enquiries@tunstall.com
w: tunstall.com

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