USING POLYMERIC MEMBRANE DRESSINGS TO SOLVE PROBLEMATIC SKIN DAMAGE FROM GASTROSTOMY LEAKAGE ON ELDERLY PATIENTS

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INTRODUCTION
Leakage of gastrostomy contents is very common in elderly patients. This is particularly true for elderly with dementia as they usually try to pull out their tube causing leakage of the gastric context. This leakage is malodorous and acidic and often leads to maceration, excoriation, pain and damage of the peristomal skin. Despite the use of barriers creams, gastric leakage can lead to the development of painful wounds. When using a VAS pain scale, looking back two years, 88% of our 60 alert patients reported a pain score of 8. All of our patients or their family members were disturbed by the odor. The gastric leaks resulted in frequent changes of over-saturated, leaking wound dressings, and time consuming and costly washing of soiled clothes.

AIM
Our goal was to increase the quality of care for our patients with gastrostomies by: minimizing their discomfort, including pain, tenderness, and itching at and around the gastrostomy site; reducing odor; absorbing leakage; reversing peristomal maceration when present, and preventing further maceration of the peristomal area; and healing the surrounding skin. We want our patients' gastrostomy sites to be so comfortable that they do not attend to the site or the dressing or even notice them, so they therefore leave the site and dressing alone.

METHOD
We evaluated polymeric membrane dressings* (PMDs) on 10 patients of which 3 had severe dementia causing them to constantly pull out their tube and surrounding dressings. The other 7 had problems with leakage, 3 with excessive leakage and 4 with moderate leakage. The PMD dressings were usually changed on a daily basis. In the 3 cases with extremely high amount of leakage, a superabsorbent pad was placed on top of the PMD in order to absorb the leaked gastric content; these dressings and the superabsorbent pads were changed every 12 hours.

Initially PMDs were considered because of their absorbency. However, the dressings have been shown to reduce pain, tenderness, signs of inflammation, and itchiness when applied to peristomal and per-wound skin. Additionally, the dressings have been shown to provide so much comfort to clients suffering from dementia that they usually stop picking at the dressing after PMDs are placed on their skin tears. These reports from other clinicians suggested that the dressings should be considered to help resolve our clients’ problems.

RESULTS
All alert patients reported a reduction of both pain and odor at their gastrostomy sites as well as rapid healing of surrounding skin. Pain, which reduced within 72 hours from a level of 8 down to 3 on a VAS scale, was mainly caused by the excoriated skin around the gastrostomy tube. The surrounding skin became intact within 3 to 10 days, depending on the severity of the initial damage. The 7 alert patients reported that the dressings felt very comfortable, but more importantly the gastrostomy site also was comfortable. The 3 patients with dementia no longer showed any signs of trying to pull out their tubes or remove their dressings; therefore, we assumed that this was an indication that the gastrostomy site was comfortable for these clients. The family members of the clients with dementia also indicated that they noticed the odor was greatly improved with the use of PMDs.

DISCUSSION
Even with the use of a special belt to keep the gastrostomy tube in place, elderly patients often dislodge or pull their tube resulting in gastrostomy leakage. We have found that leakage gastrostomy has a negative psychological impact on our clients and families. Very often, the elderly refused to go out of their rooms to join other people as they were embarrassed by the continuous soiling and staining of their clothes. The presence of an odor was also affecting their relationships with other residents. Now, after implementing PMDs, the clients no longer pay attention to their gastrostomy sites because the sites are no longer uncomfortable or create an odor.

After changing our regime to use PMDs, we now have more confident, social patients in our nursing home. As an unexpected positive side effect of changing to use of PMDs, we have decreased our cost of laundry by 15%.

References

*PolyMem* Wound Dressings. Manufactured by Ferris Mfg. 5133 Northeast Parkway, Fort Worth, TX 76106, USA. This case study was unsponsored.