

Research Area: Hygiene

The topic of hygiene and personal care textiles cover a wide variety of products which include: wipes, incontinence products, ostomy products, wet and dry products, flannels, towels and other textiles which are used as part of a daily hygiene routine.



Aspects such as reusability and disposability were also considered as part of our research.



Key Findings

- Hygiene products appeal to all generations, however the elderly also require special products which cater to physiological changes to their skin.
- Differing levels of mobility affect how much a person can engage in their hygiene routine.
- Culture can also effect a person's hygiene routine i.e. religion.

Background

Hygiene is practised to preserve health and well-being as well as reducing the incidence and spread of infection and disease. Hygiene refers not only to personal cleanliness but also applies to our surroundings, commodities or any circumstance in which our safe and healthy environment is endangered. What is considered 'hygienic' can also vary significantly across different countries and cultures

Hygiene practice is a part of our everyday lives and hygiene textile products dominate this market sector. Leading market brands such as SCA, Tena, Kimberly Clark, Proctor and Gamble have a high prevalence within this market sector.

All age groups have specific hygiene routines and practices however, it is known that during our life course the condition of our skin changes over time in the main, it becomes more susceptible to damage, elasticity decreases and takes a longer time to heal.

Although hygiene applies to people of all ages, TAGS investigated if there was a need for specialised products for an older generation in terms of ease of use and also functionality.

Aims & Objectives

The aim of TAGS was to explore the current state of the hygiene practices in elderly care with regards to products and routines, such that difficulties could be highlighted in order to direct the scope of research to solutions. The information gained by approaching experts in the field and focussing the consortiums efforts will be used to generate development in the area of hygiene textiles, specifically aimed at solving issues seen in elderly care.

Approach & Methods

A literature review assessing existing products has been made together with research into state of the art technology, general aspects of production and the possibilities of modifying material properties.

Questionnaire's were also administered to care homes to regional areas local to consortium members in Austria, Germany, Italy and the UK to be answered on behalf of residents.

Questionnaire's addressed the following topics:

- What types of disposable and reusable products are in use
 - How they rank in terms of use (good-bad)
- Perceived hygiene concerns of elderly residents
- If mobility levels have an effect on a person's attitude to hygiene practice
- What amount of people are able to perform hygiene practice on their own or with assistance

Following the results from the questionnaires, brainstorming sessions were held at the TAGS bi-annual meetings in which the consortium and external speakers were invited to discuss the problems highlighted. All participants were then asked to come up with ideas for innovations or ways in which existing products can be altered to better suit elderly users.

Results

With decreased mobility and decreased autonomy in terms of personal hygiene, conventional textile washing products are replaced by disposable products like wipes. Caregivers report that disposable products are extremely good to handle and save time if care is given to immobile people. This also highlights that the durable or reusable products are deficient in care of the elderly.

The contribution to personal hygiene practice decreases strongly with decreased mobility. It can be seen that most problems occur in tasks which require a higher level of coordination such as

showering, or shaving whereas more simple practices like teeth cleaning or hair brushing can still be done without assistance. The more complex tasks thus demand more time from the caregivers.

Residents that suffer from dementia demand a lot time from caregivers as they may forget or protest to hygiene practices. Caregivers have to be very sensitive to their mood changes and catch the opportune moment to undertake hygiene routines. According to caregivers some dementia residents accept being washed only once per week. This causes problems when it comes to obligatory treatments like catheter changing and more intimate care. For some patients suffering from dementia only basic hygiene practices are delivered due to the low acceptance rate. Comments from caregivers also showed that some residents in their care only become concerned about their skin if it causes any pain.

Cultural aspects can also create barriers in hygiene practice; however it is important not to ignore these aspects as culture can help form a person's identity which should be preserved in the latter years of life.

Cost remains, of course, a factor when it comes to product selection. It is evident that poor purchasing decision are made across care channels due to cost constraints, however the vast array of products can also be overwhelming causing people to make ill-informed choices such as choosing the maximum quantity of a product at the cheapest price. Solutions to overcome such factors would be to create information exchange platforms in care infrastructure where carer's can share their experiences of certain products and to access information where they can better learn about a products functionality and how it performs.

Support & Collaboration

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For more information on the TAGS project, please visit the website at:

www.textilesforageingsociety.eu/

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