HOW TO...

ACHIEVE PRESSURE ULCER PREVENTION

Beth Mercer, Commercial Manager at Algeos, highlights best practice and efficiencies concerning the treatment and prevention of pressure ulcers in care homes.

Prevention is key

The good old saying, 'Prevention is better than cure' or, 'An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure' could not be truer in the instance of pressure ulcers. Anyone who has vulnerable, at-risk skin or has existing pressure ulcers needs to be repositioned frequently to alleviate further damage and promote healing.

Pressure injuries, also known as pressure or bed sores, cost the NHS £1.4m a day, which is approximately 4% of its annual expenditure, affecting around 700,000 people a year. Not only is pressure ulcer prevention key, but it is also a crucial element and factor of care, in my opinion.

Pressure ulcers, or bedsores, are a significant challenge in care homes, often affecting residents living with limited mobility and complex health conditions, such as dementia and those in end of life or palliative care. These wounds not only reduce quality of life but also place a strain on staff, resources, and care standards. Not only a considerable issue, but pressure ulcers are also costly and impact negatively those who suffer with them.

Automatic Lateral Turning Systems (ALTS) offer a practical and innovative solution to these challenges, helping care homes improve outcomes and elevate care standards.

The stats

Pressure ulcers are the most common condition among palliative care patients at home care facilities and impose a significant burden on patients, their relatives, and caregivers. (Lovely, et al.2022). Additionally, they are common, costly, and impact negatively on individuals. According to the *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, repositioning older persons at risk of pressure ulcers using the 30-degree tilt, reduces the incidence of pressure ulcers compared with usual care.

372,035 people live in care homes in England, according to the latest ONS data, and of the 65 years and over care home population, 56.4% of residents are aged 85 years and over, ONS data also reports. The demand for care services is expected to increase significantly due to the ageing population. Lastly, ONS data projects that the number of people aged 85 and over in the UK

will double over the next 20 years, reaching around three million by 2045.

Automatic Lateral Turning Systems

Traditional manual repositioning is labour-intensive and can be challenging to perform consistently, especially in residents with cognitive impairments or those near the end of life. ALTS offer a solution by providing consistent, automated repositioning, reducing the risk of pressure ulcers, and potentially reducing the burden on caregivers.

I am very passionate about pressure ulcers and what can be done to reduce and minimise the pain and distress they cause. My grandmother suffered terribly and struggled for many years with pressure ulcers, many of which did not heal, and contributed to her death a few years ago. Frequent manual repositioning was excruciating, yet necessary, for her. I could see the impact it would have on the caregivers too, who came into her home four times a day, and again in the nighttime, not to mention the knock-on effect of the family feeling helpless to ease her pain.

Her home was well equipped – community services supplied the bed and recommended an air flow mattress. However, for my grandmother, and for many others, it did not assist with repositioning, and offloading pressure, and it was far from dignified. Fast forward a couple of years and there are some fantastic ALTS available to the care sector.

The Levabo Turn All® is an underlay mattress that turns any medical profiling bed into an ALTS with almost any mattress. It has been developed in line with the EPUAP 2019 guidelines that recommend the 30-degree tilt in the side lying position as the optimum for pressure offloading. The Levabo Turn All® has a patented five-degree counter tilt built into the mattress to prevent slippage when rotating from left to right in the automated turning process. Preventing pressure ulcers in care homes is a critical aspect of resident care, and innovative ALTS play a significant role in this endeavour.

Trialled and tested

In 2024, I wrote a White Paper following a trial of the Levabo Turn All® system to assess the benefits of automatic repositioning versus traditional manual methods and the approach to pressure ulcer prevention in care homes. The trial was supported by Care England. The results were positive, and the nursing homes that took part have invested in the systems for their residents and caregivers.

The White Paper focussed on residents living with dementia with multiple and complex comorbidities, and those receiving end of life or palliative care who are particularly vulnerable to pressure ulcers, due to immobility and frailty. The primary aims were to assess the effectiveness of the system in reducing pressure ulcer incidence, its impact on caregiver workload, resident comfort, and overall cost-effectiveness.

During the trial, the system was successful for residents living with or receiving:

- Dementia or dementia with challenging behaviours.
- Existing pressure ulcers or vulnerable, at-risk skin.
- Limited or no mobility.
- Pressure ulcer prevention and treatment.
- End of life or palliative care.
- Critical illness.
- Spinal or neurological conditions.

Cost saving and efficient solutions

ALTS save valuable time and staff resources. A cost effective, time saving tool, the Levabo Turn All® system saved two hours of staff time per day over a 24-hour period in comparison to traditional manual repositioning methods, the White Paper found.

One of the providers who took part in the trial, Taylor & Taylor, reported that the Levabo Turn All® is a labour-saving piece of equipment, and its calculations show that it is also a cost-effective way forward for caring for bedbound residents, or residents with risk of skin damage or ulceration. 'We have saved £230.12 daily and £1610.84 weekly,' the provider fed back.

Participating providers also reported a reduction in musculoskeletal-related injuries from the moving and repositioning

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→ of residents. In addition, a decrease in staff sickness reduces the burden of caregiver shortages and ensures satisfactory staffing to care for residents.

Best practice

Incorporating ALTS and pressure offloading devices can help address common challenges associated with pressure ulcer prevention, including:

- Regular repositioning to relieve pressure on vulnerable areas.
- Operating pressure relieving equipment.
- Skin care.
- Nutrition.
- Risk assessments.
- Training.

Feedback from the trial noted that residents who previously struggled with nutrition intake due to poor sleep reported that improved sleep benefited their overall health and wellbeing, enabling improvements to their quality of life during the day, and an increase in food and fluid intake. Effective prevention requires a proactive approach to pressure offloading and maintaining skin integrity.

Benefits of ALTS include:

1. Effective pressure offloading

ALTS ensure consistent repositioning, reducing prolonged pressure on vulnerable areas. Prolonged pressure on bony areas such as the sacrum, heels and hips, cuts off blood flow leading to tissue damage. ALTS provide automated lateral turning, gently repositioning residents at regular intervals. In addition, it eliminates the need for manual repositioning by staff, ensuring consistent pressure relief without disrupting residents' sleep. This reduces the risk of pressure ulcers by distributing pressure evenly. It also promotes better blood flow and supports tissue healing.

2. Maintains skin integrity

The system's design promotes skin health by minimising friction and shear forces during movement. Fragile skin is susceptible to breakdown, particularly when exposed to moisture from incontinence or perspiration. The Levabo Turn All® system includes a breathable, moisture moisture-resistant surface that keeps the skin dry and protected.

3. Reduces staff burden

Repositioning residents every two hours, as recommended, is time-consuming and physically demanding for staff. ALTS reduce the need for manual intervention, freeing up staff time to focus on other aspects of care. This saves time and reduces physical strain on caregivers and ensures consistent care, even during busy shifts.

4. Improves resident comfort

Gentle, regular movements enhance comfort and can lead to better sleep quality. Manual repositioning can be uncomfortable for residents, disrupting their rest and increasing agitation. The gentle, automated movement of ALTS minimise discomfort and promotes better sleep. Residents feel secure and supported throughout the turning process. This enhances quality of life improving comfort and restfulness, whilst reducing stress and anxiety associated with frequent manual repositioning.

5. Enhances care standards

Implementing such advanced technology demonstrates a commitment to high-quality care, can improve overall outcomes, and provides sufficient ongoing staff training. Pressure ulcers can harm a care home's reputation, leading to regulatory scrutiny and family dissatisfaction.

By integrating ALTS into care protocols, care homes can proactively prevent pressure ulcers, thereby improving resident wellbeing and operational efficiency.

Why it matters

Preserving the dignity of residents to limit intrusive care leads to a greater sense of happiness and contentment. ALTS offer care homes an effective and efficient solution to the complex challenges of pressure ulcer prevention. By automating pressure offloading, maintaining skin integrity, and reducing staff workloads, it empowers care providers to deliver higher standards of care and enhance residents' quality of life.

If you would like to read the White Paper discussed in this feature, titled *Preventing Pressure Ulcers: The Role of Automatic Lateral Turning Systems for Innovative Approaches to Pressure Ulcer Prevention in Care Homes*, visit the **Care England website**.

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