

**LA TROBE UNIVERSITY**


**ACEBAC**  
The Australian Centre for Evidence Based Aged Care

**Sex in the City (and the Country)**

Staff knowledge and attitudes towards sexuality in the residential aged care setting

Linda McAuliffe  
Dr Michael Bauer  
Prof Rhonda Nay

Australian Centre for Evidence Based Aged Care  
Australian Institute for Primary Care & Ageing  
Faculty of Health Sciences, La Trobe University  
[www.latrobe.edu.au/aipca](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/aipca)



**Sexuality...more than just sex!**

Sexuality encompasses...

'...sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships.'


([http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/gender/sexual\\_health.html](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/gender/sexual_health.html))



**Sexuality is a part of sexual health**

'Sexual health is a state of physical, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.'


([http://www.who.int/topics/sexual\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/sexual_health/en/))



**What does sexuality mean to residents in aged care?**

- getting dressed up and feeling pampered
- being complimented
- spending time in mixed sex groups
- looking one's best
- enjoying sexually stimulating/explicit media
- talking 'dirty'
- going to bed with a partner and cuddling, kissing and 'having sex'
- masturbating
- being with a sex worker

(Nay, 2004)




**Expressing sexuality is good for you!**

- Enhances quality of life and general well-being
- Increases self-esteem, self-image, self-worth, component of personhood
- Healthier interpersonal relationships, mental health
  - Decreased loneliness/depression
- Physical health benefits
  - Fitness, exercise of muscle groups, raised heart rate




**Sexuality & Older People: Common attitudes**

- Older people do not have sexual desires
- Older people are not able to make love, even if they wanted to
- Older people are too fragile and might hurt themselves if they attempt to engage in sexual relations
- Older people are physically unattractive and are therefore sexually undesirable
- The whole notion of older people engaging in sex is shameful and perverse



## Sexuality & Older People: Impact of attitudes on aged care

- No provision of information prior to entering aged care
- There is no assessment of residents' needs
  - Not part of routine care
  - Person is not asked about their needs
  - Person is not informed about potential impact of illness or medications on sexual behaviour
  - Person is denied sexual health care – risk of STDs
- Privacy is denied



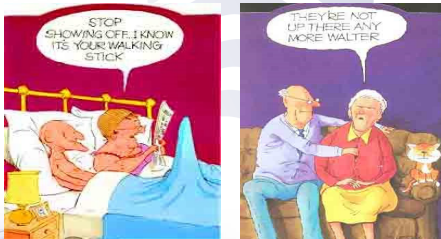
## Sexuality & Older People: Impact of attitudes on aged care

- Often family-centred instead of resident-centred
- Staff do not receive education and training in this area
- Behaviours are often interpreted by staff as inappropriate
  - Lack of understanding by staff re dementia
  - True hypersexuality is relatively rare
- Often the behaviour is due to an unmet need or confusion
- Psychotropics given rather than addressing the unmet need



## Sexuality & Older People: Impact of attitudes on aged care

- Sexuality in later life is often the butt of humour:



## Nine oldsters booted out of nursing home — for trying to have an orgy!

**LONDON** — A group of nine love-hungry codgers were booted out of an old folks' home — after they tried to have an orgy in the recreation room!

The unidentified oldsters, who ranged in age from 75 to 84, had apparently planned the unauthorised after-hours get-together for weeks, according to Melinda Hellerford, spokesperson for the well-respected Edith Scarborough Nursing Home.

"They somehow got it in their heads to celebrate the 50th birthday of one of the women with a kind of sex party," said Miss Hellerford.

"This may sound harmless or amusing to some people, but Scarborough has a reputation to uphold. We cannot tolerate that kind of conduct."

The nursing home made a concerted effort to keep the bizarre story out of the press and no details are difficult to come by.

But according to British papers, the let-it-all-hang-out party took place just after midnight on October 28. The three wrinkly Romanes and six sagging incontinence gals gathered together in the rec room and stripped to the buff.

"They really set the scene," a nursing home staffer who was not identified told a London tabloid. "They'd got their hands on candles, which they lit, and even got on music to create a sexy mood."

The nude senior gals went on for about 20 minutes before orderlies heard rumba music coming from the recreational room and went to investigate.

When they opened the doors, they were shocked to find the old-timers crowded together in their birthday suits, slathered with baby oil.

"They hadn't got too far — I guess it was taking some of the gents a while to get started," the staffer said.

"But they were all naked. Believe me, it was the scariest thing I've seen in my life."

**By MIKE FOSTER**  
*Weekly World News*



## Sexuality & Older People: An issue that will affect us all!

- But what is so funny about:
- Having no privacy (ever again!)
  - Being unable to share a bed with your partner (ever again!)
  - Being denied sexual health care
  - Being at potential risk of STDs
  - Being labelled as a 'dirty old man'
  - Not being told medication may make you impotent
  - Staff acting as your moral guardians?

Is this a future you would want for yourself?



## Sexuality Workshop Study (Overview)

- Pre-test/post-test design
- Residential aged care staff (rural/regional Victoria)
- Questionnaire:
  - 'Aging and sexuality knowledge and attitudes scale' (White, 1982)
  - Additional dementia-specific items from the 'Staff attitudes about intimacy and dementia survey' (Kuhn, 2002)
- Intervention = Education workshop (3 hours)



## Sexuality Workshop Study (Intervention)

Education workshop covering key topics:

- Definition of sexuality
- Sexuality and ageing
- Benefits of sexuality
- Attitudes, myths, and stereotypes
- Sexual expression and behaviours in residential aged care
- Sexuality and dementia
- The role of the health professional
- Residents' rights and responsibilities
- Reporting requirements



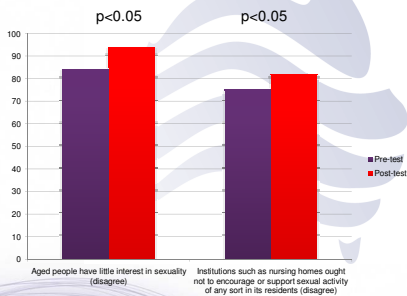
## Sexuality Workshop Study (Respondents)

Gender	Female	95%
	Male	5%
Age	18-40	19%
	41-60	75%
	61+	6%
Position	RN/EN	90%
	PCW	5%
	Other	5%

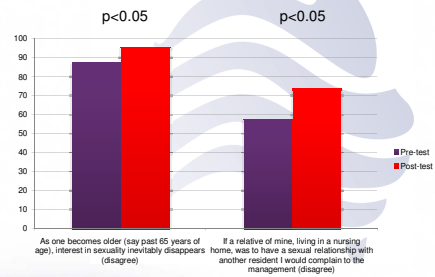
Pre-test n=113; Post-test n=106



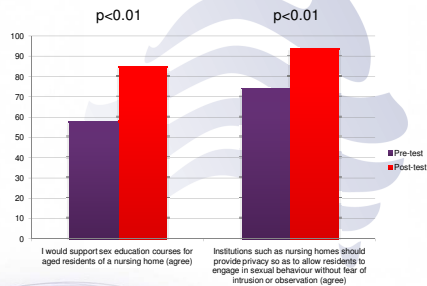
## Sexuality Workshop Study (Results)



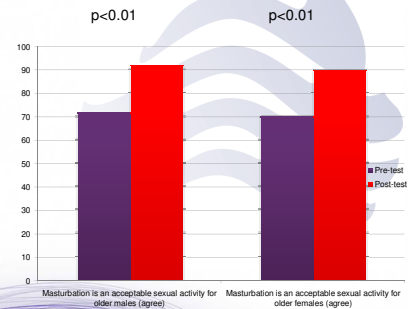
## Sexuality Workshop Study (Results)

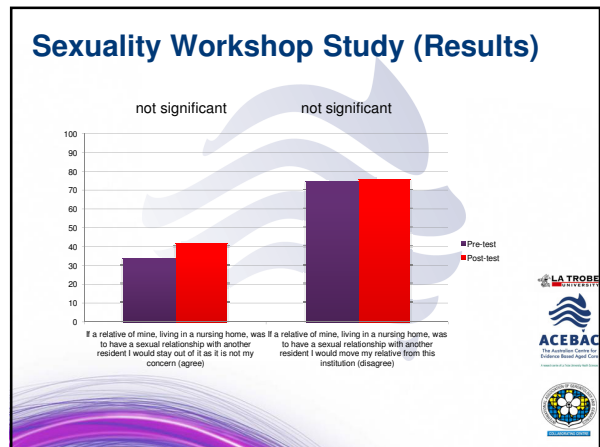
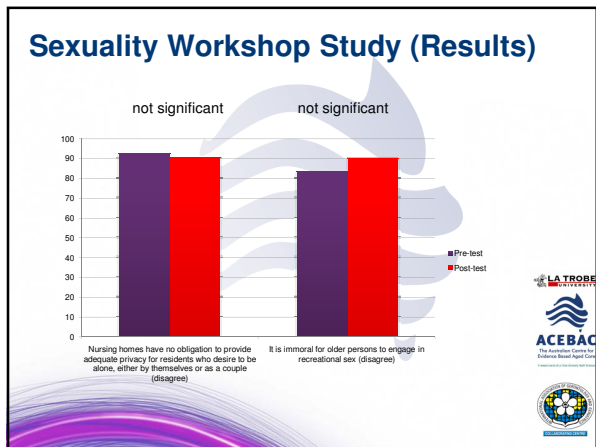
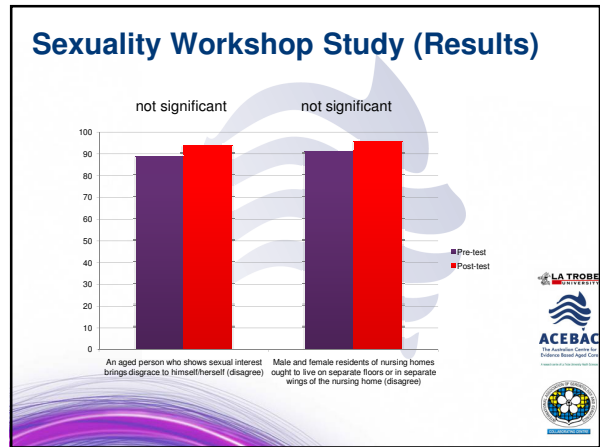
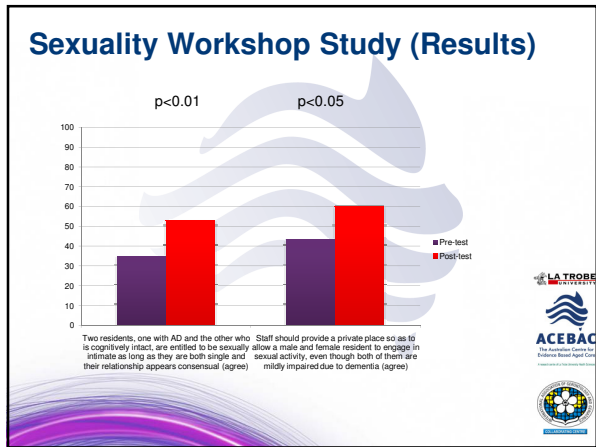
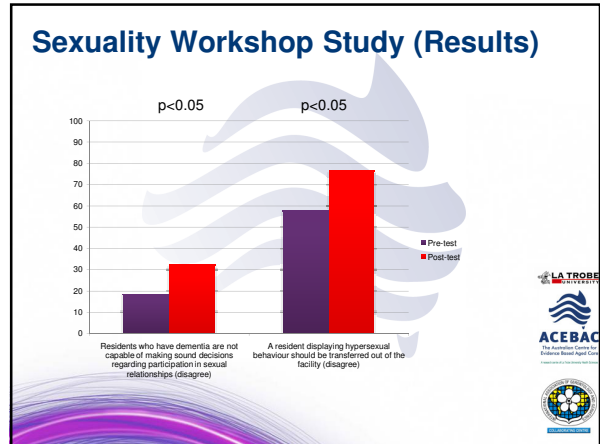
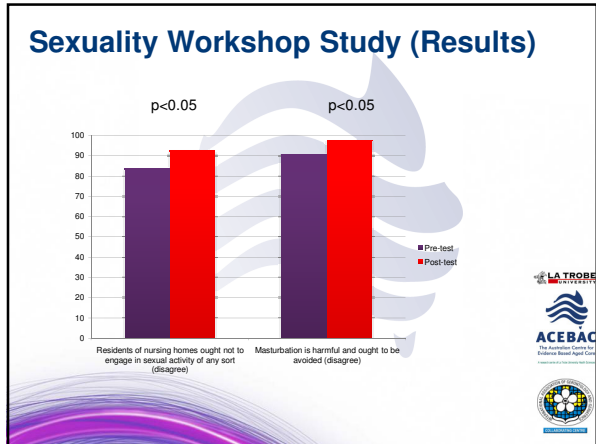


## Sexuality Workshop Study (Results)



## Sexuality Workshop Study (Results)





## Sexuality Workshop Study (Results)

Overall, attitudes were significantly more permissive following the education intervention

$X^2=11.5$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $n=218$  (White scale)

$X^2=10.5$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.01$ ,  $n=218$  (dementia specific items from Kuhn scale)

Attitudes improved most for items related to the theme of 'staff understanding of sexual needs'

Attitudes were most immune to change for items related to the theme of 'staff considering their own relative in care'



## Where to next...

- Need to determine whether the attitudinal change is maintained over time
- Need to determine whether staff attitudes impact on practice
- Need to ensure staff receive education
- Need to train staff in how to conduct a sexual health and sexual needs assessment
- Need to develop policy to guide staff



## Last words...



'It's not about our views, but their civil rights...we're here to create an environment that allows grown-ups to do what grown-ups do.'

(Bonfazi, 2000, p24)



## Selected reading

- Bauer, M. (1999). Their only privacy is between their sheets: Privacy and the sexuality of elderly nursing home residents. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, 25, 37-41.
- Bauer, M. (1999). The use of humour in addressing the sexuality of elderly nursing home residents. *Sexuality and Disability*, 17(2), 147-155.
- Bauer, M., McAuliffe, L., & Nay, R. (2007). Sexuality, health care and the older person: An overview of the literature. *International Journal of Older People Nursing*, 2, 63-68.
- Bauer, M. Nay, R., McAuliffe, L. (2009). Catering to love sex and intimacy in RAC: What information is provided to consumers. *Sexuality and Disability*, 27, 3-9.
- Kuhn, D. (2002). Intimacy, sexuality and residents with dementia. *Alzheimer's Care Quarterly*, 3(2), 165-176.
- McAuliffe, L., Bauer, M., & Nay, R. (2007). Barriers to the expression of sexuality in the older person: The role of the health professional. *International Journal of Older People Nursing*, 2, 69-75.
- Nay, R., McAuliffe, L., & Bauer, M. (2007). Sexuality: From stigma, stereotypes and secrecy to coming out, communication and choice. *International Journal of Older People Nursing*, 2, 76-80.
- White, C. B. (1982). A scale for the assessment of attitudes and knowledge regarding sexuality in the aged. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 11(6), 491-502.

