

A PILOT STUDY TO EVALUATE REUSABLE ABSORBENT BODY-WORN PRODUCTS FOR ADULTS WITH MODERATE TO HEAVY URINARY INCONTINENCE

Aims of Study

Washable absorbent products offer an alternative and potentially advantageous method of containment for urinary incontinent people. Although reusable bed protection and body-worn products for light incontinence are widely used, reusable body-worn products for moderate/heavy urinary incontinence are rarely used. Previous studies of such products have used a variety of performance parameters and are no longer contemporary (1-7). Budgetary concerns and, to a lesser extent, environmental issues, have led to renewed interest in this product group. The aim of this pilot study was to evaluate all reusable products for moderate/heavy urinary incontinence available in the UK in September 2001 and to compare them with equivalent disposables.

Methods

14 adults (age range:28-67 years) tested up to 19 reusable and three disposable products in a random order. Performance was recorded on a 28-point **product performance questionnaire** as 'good', 'okay', or 'poor'. A record of product leaked (*none, a little, a lot*) and time of use (day or night) was made in the **pad leakage diary**. Subjects were interviewed three times during the study:

First interview: Subjects defined product characteristics they considered to be key for selection, anticipated advantages from use of reusables and their views on the concept of reusability. They then selected the reusable products they wished to test.

Second interview: Product fit was checked and documentation explained to the subjects.

Third interview: Subjects commented further on product performance, how the use of reusable products had affected their lifestyles, preferred style of product, how products could be improved and whether they would be willing to continue using reusable products.

Results

The subjects were keen to try something different and felt they would be doing their bit for the environment. The subjects hoped that using reusables would lead to the need for fewer products, less reliance on delivery services and greater independence particularly for travel. Fitting the products was very difficult especially the all-in-one pads and pant-style products on larger subjects. The four key product attributes were cited as: low leakage/high absorbency, discreteness, comfort and fit. Table 1 illustrates how product performance varied widely for these aspects and that no one design stood out as better than another.

The best performing reusable product was surprisingly the Paddy T since it is made from terry towelling and uses nappy pins. The more absorbent products tended to be bulky and conversely the discreet products leaked a lot. The disposable products compared favourably with the reusable products although for night use the reusable Paddy T was the best performing product.

Although most subjects found at least one product that was helpful in some way, their overall view was that reusables require significant improvement before they present a viable alternative to disposables. Only one subject indicated a future purchase of a reusable product although some subjects felt that reusables in conjunction with disposables might prove useful. Subjects found dealing with wet/soiled product when away from home problematic.

Conclusions

Overall reusable absorbents for moderate/heavy incontinence do not perform well although some might provide an alternative, for example, for night use when absorbency is of greater

priority than discreteness. Users should be given the opportunity to try a range of products to establish the optimum system for their needs.

Table 1 Performance for the top four product characteristics of the six top ranked products for 'overall performance' The figures represent the percentage of subjects who tested that product and rated it as 'good'

Product name <i>N.B italics denotes the product as disposable</i>	Overall opinion	Leakage/ Absorbency	Discreteness	Comfort	Fit
Paddy T (9)	78	67	11	89	67
<i>SCA Hygiene:Tenaslip Plus</i> (13)	69	58	46	77	62
Shiloh: Shaped insert pad: Super (4)	50	0	50	75	25
Med-I-pant: Chamonix insert pad (300mls) (2)	50	0	100	100	0
Bullen: Terry towelling nappy (10)	40	50	40	70	20
Bullen: Terry towelling trainer pant (12)	33	25	17	92	50
The figures in brackets adjacent to the product details indicate the number of subjects out of a total of 14 who chose to test that product. It is recognised that a limitation of this pilot study is that some products were selected for testing by a very few subjects.					

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