

## Surestop stopcock – Occupational therapy case study

### John and Mary

Thanks to the installation of a Surestop stopcock with a remote switch John and Mary can be sure that their home is safe from flooding and John, who has dementia is protected from scalds and burns in their family bathroom. Before the installation of the Surestop stopcock, John was waking in the night to use the bathroom and occasionally blocking the sink, leaving the taps running. This caused some flooding and potentially could have resulted in significant damage to their home. The resulting floodwater on their bathroom floor also posed an environmental falls hazard to both John and his wife Mary. In a previous incident of flooding, Mary had fallen in the bathroom, slipping on the wet flooring.

### The Challenges of Reducing Bathroom Risks

Washing and bathing independently remained an important occupation to John, Mary was reluctant to change their bathroom or prevent John from accessing it at night. Several traditional low-tech and everyday solutions had previously been suggested by family members and tried by Mary, these including removing plugs, fitting anti-scalding devices, tap locks and providing a bedside urinal bottle. Although both John and Mary were keen to try these solutions, as with many people living with Dementia, John did not respond well to these changes in his routine and after a short time always reverted to his old habits and routines, rejecting the new equipment such as the tap locks, which eventually resulted in another flooding incident. This time causing considerable damage to the room below, which John found particularly distressing as he could no longer sit in his usual seat to read the newspaper every morning.

### Occupational Therapy Assessment

John was referred to an occupational therapist for a holistic and person-centred assessment of need, the occupational therapist used the Person, Environment, Occupation and Performance (PEOP) model to frame the assessment and intervention planning.

#### **Person**

The occupational therapy assessment looked at both the needs of John and his wife Mary together, who were keen to remain as independent as possible in their own home. They were both highly motivated to try new things, but John's ability to learn new routines or

adapt to new equipment was limited, due to his dementia he often forgot why it was there. In addition to the risk of flooding and falls, the potential risk of scalding and burns was identified as John struggled to understand the bathroom mixer tap and often turned it onto hot water only and left it running to fill the sink. As a result of the flooding incidents, John's wife Mary was often awake in the night checking the taps, and this broken sleep and worry were adding to the challenges she already faced as a full-time carer for John.

### **Environment**

The risk of further flooding posed a serious risk to both Mary and John, resulting in a potentially hazardous bathroom environment where they might experience another fall. Although most falls do not result in serious injury, the negative outcomes of a fall are considerable and can include: 'psychological problems (for example, a fear of falling and loss of confidence in being able to move about safely); loss of mobility, leading to social isolation and depression; increase in dependency and disability; hypothermia; pressure-related injury and infection' (NICE 2013). John also struggled to safely operate their shower, no longer able to recognise the correct settings for the temperature, making showering alone a potentially dangerous activity.

The assessment identified that John's daytime routine centred around going to buy and then reading a daily newspaper, the damage done to his downstairs room had left this part of the house mouldy and unpleasant to spend time in. This prevented him from sitting in the window as usual and this caused him considerable anxiety each day.

### **Occupation**

The Alzheimer's Society recommends maintaining regular routines for everyday activities, as they help people with dementia remain healthy and enable greater independence. During this period John was experiencing considerable occupational disruption, with both his nocturnal and daytime routines disturbed by the constant changes and different tradespeople coming and going to undertake repairs following the repeated flooding incidents.

The assessment also identified that relaxing in the bath was an important occupation for Mary, representing the only opportunity she had to engage in a meaningful activity focussed just on herself. During the assessment Mary raised concerns that significant changes to the bathroom such as installing a new shower system would potentially prevent her from undertaking this meaningful occupation as space was limited, they had been previously advised the bath would need to be removed. The assessment also noted that John needed to independently use his bathroom at night and any obvious cosmetic changes to the bathroom might not be accepted by John, causing further occupational disruption.

## A Safe Solution

The occupational therapist knew that the bathroom needed to be both safe for John and still function as a working bathroom for both John and Mary's self-care needs. The need for a significant bathroom change was avoided and instead, the occupational therapist arranged for the installation of a Surestop stopcock with a discreet remote switch. The Surestop Stopcock was installed easily and offers economical water management control.

*"The Surestop stopcock is safe to use in bathrooms and easy to arrange for installation as its unique design means no electricians or batteries are involved, it works purely on the water pressure." -Occupational Therapist.*

With the simple flick of the switch, the Surestop stopcock instantly turned off the water to the bathroom. Useful in an emergency, but Mary now also turns it off at night and when not in the bathroom to supervise John. He therefore only showers when she can assist him and has no access to running water at night, washing his hands in a small bowl instead. By focussing on retaining the occupations that held meaning to both Mary and John, the occupational therapist was able to justify the provision and installation of the Surestop stopcock. From the person-centred assessment, it was clear that John thrived when able to maintain his daily routines and that noticeable changes to the home environment such as tap locks, or the damage caused by the flood downstairs caused him considerable distress.

Thanks to the Surestop stopcock John can now access his bathroom at night without the potential risk of flooding and Mary can sleep well reassured that he is also protected from accidental scalds and burns. The risk of nocturnal falls posed by unexpected flood water underfoot has been eliminated and the bathroom itself remains unchanged. Mary can continue to enjoy a regular soak in the bath and now the risk of further flooding has gone, the downstairs room was also restored, so John has resumed reading his morning paper in his usual seat.

## References

The Alzheimer's Association <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/staying-independent/everyday-tasks-dementia>

British Burns Association Toolkit ([www.britishburnsassociation.org](http://www.britishburnsassociation.org))

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2013) Falls the assessment and prevention of falls in older people (Clinical Guideline CG161). London: NICE. Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg161>

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