

The RCN's definition of dignity

Dignity is concerned with how people feel, think and behave in relation to the worth or value of themselves and others. To treat someone with dignity is to treat them as being of worth, in a way that is respectful of them as valued individuals.

In care situations, dignity may be promoted or diminished by: the physical environment; organisational culture; by the attitudes and behaviour of the nursing team and others and by the way in which care activities are carried out.

When dignity is present people feel in control, valued, confident, comfortable and able to make decisions for themselves. When dignity is absent people feel devalued, lacking control and comfort. They may lack confidence and be unable to make decisions for themselves. They may feel humiliated, embarrassed or ashamed.

Dignity applies equally to those who have capacity and to those who lack it. Everyone has equal worth as human beings and must be treated as if they are able to feel, think and behave in relation to their own worth or value.

The nursing team should, therefore, treat all people in all settings and of any health status with dignity, and dignified care should continue after death. (RCN 2008)