

The Adolescent Bladder Clinic – Improving Engagement and Outcomes in Adolescents with Urinary Incontinence

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Background:

Urinary incontinence (UI) in adolescence is an under-recognised and stigmatising condition that adversely affects quality of life, mental health, and social participation. It is associated with poor self-image, reduced wellbeing, strained relationships, significant personal burden, and parental distress. Beyond medical concerns, UI can lead to emotional withdrawal, avoidance behaviours, and anxiety or depressive symptoms. The secrecy surrounding the condition often magnifies these effects. Despite its impact, there are currently no established models of care for this population.

Approach:

The Adolescent Bladder Clinic (ABC) is a novel, developmentally informed, multidisciplinary service addressing UI within a biopsychosocial framework. It provides holistic, developmentally appropriate care for adolescents with nocturnal and/or daytime wetting. Collaborative care involves a paediatrician, physiotherapist, nurse, and psychologist, offering individual and family support, psychoeducation, and advocacy across settings.

Impact:

The ABC demonstrates that age-specific, adolescent-focused care improves engagement and clinical outcomes. Research shows adolescents prefer age-appropriate clinics with peer relatability, value supportive, non-judgemental communication, and emphasize shared decision-making. Technology such as apps or telehealth enhance treatment and access, while care aligned with broader life goals supports school, social participation, and independence. Clinically, among treatment-resistant adolescents who have accessed the ABC, 60% achieved dryness and 40% improved after 4–6 sessions; in the new patient group, 37.5% are dry and 50% improved. These results far exceed comparable international success rates (~10%), demonstrating the effectiveness of this tailored approach.

Significance:

The ABC is the first model of care designed specifically for adolescents with UI, using a biopsychosocial framework. By centring the young person, aligning treatment with life goals, and using flexible, technology-supported interventions, the clinic addresses critical gaps in adolescent continence care. This model provides an evidence-based approach that can inform policy, enhance access, and improve long-term outcomes for adolescents.

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