

Reluctant to Wash?

A workshop to explore self neglect and how to respond

'The artist Piero Manzoni canned his faeces in 1961. Tin number 018 changed hands at Sotheby's in 2007 for 120,000 euros, suggesting considerable demand for this artform'.¹

As this unsettling quotation illustrates, we have very confused reactions to personal hygiene and its breaches. Despite powerful training in childhood and constant reminders through the media and advertising, some adults in Western society seriously neglect their appearance and personal hygiene and grooming, and we don't know why.

A number of these individuals are in touch with health or social care services due to disability, homelessness, mental health issues or age-related difficulties. Serious Case Reviews demonstrate that at its worst, self neglect is deadly. Along with relatives and friends, health and social care staff sometimes intervene to try and help the self-neglecting person improve their personal hygiene, but there are no interventions that are known to be effective. We think every team has a story to tell.

Workshop goals

To provide a space for participants to reflect on their own experience in this field and draw out lessons for future practice, research, service design and commissioning.

To teach participants about relevant findings from evolutionary biology, social psychology, anthropology, health promotion and a range of other fields, to enhance understanding of the way that we respond to people who appear to be reluctant to wash.

To consider how well local arrangements serve people who are at risk through severe self neglect, including assessment methodologies, competing values in partner organisations and multi-agency responses.

To work together to identify shared recommendations for individual professional development and service improvements, thus reducing the number of people who are adversely affected by self neglect.

To find out more, contact peter.bates@ndti.org.uk or call 07710 439 677.

¹ Pisani E, Leviticus be damned: Dirt in the community in Cox R, George R, Horne RH, Nagle R, Pisani E, Ralph B & Smith V (2011) *Dirt: The filthy reality of everyday life* Profile Books.