

# A national strategy to manage lower limb wounds

Inconsistent care in the NHS has been highlighted in recent years. Here, the development of the National Wound Care Strategy Programme, whose aim is to ensure every person in England with a lower limb wound receives optimal care, is described.



The challenges faced by the National Health Service (NHS) — budget restrictions and resource and staff shortages — are well known and often publicised. These difficulties have been made worse by the impact that COVID-19 has had on an NHS already close to breaking point. It is also recognised that these issues can have a negative impact on the treatment that patients receive. There is a postcode lottery in which treatment quality varies depending on the circumstances within the locality.

Less well known is the impact that wounds place on the NHS each year. In recent years, several studies (Guest et al, 2015; 2020; Gray et al, 2018) have shed a

light on the cost of wounds for healthcare services and people with wounds alike:

- A recent estimate highlighted that wounds cost NHS England approximately £8.3 billion in the period 2017/18. This amount is approaching the combined total cost of osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis to the NHS
- A lot of this cost results from unwarranted variation in care. Although guidelines exist that are based on clinical evidence, these aren't always used and followed
- This is the case for people with venous leg ulcers, who were shown in the studies not to always receive an assessment and diagnosis of their wound type. This included vascular

assessment, which determines blood flow to the affected limb, and confirms that compression therapy can be used safely

- There are several reasons for this which include a shortage of experienced staff, lack of time for training of new and existing staff, lack of resources to carry out treatment and restricted funds.
- These shortcomings result in some people with lower limb wounds not healing as quickly as they might, if their treatment was the best it could be from the beginning.
- Wounds that remain unhealed cost the NHS 2.5 times more than wounds that heal, over the course of a year (Guest et al, 2015; 2020; Gray et al, 2018).

The authors of the published research studies (Guest et al, 2015; 2020; Gray et al, 2018) recommended that these issues should be dealt with on a national level, not just at individual care locations, so that treatments are optimised consistently for everyone with a lower limb condition. In response, NHS England commissioned a National Wound Care Strategy Programme (NWCSP) in 2018 to address these issues. Below, Una Adderley, Director of NWCSP, describes the work of the Programme to date. ▶

Guest JF, et al. *BMJ Open* 2015; Gray TA, *BMJ Open* 2018; Guest JF, et al. *BMJ Open* 2020



### Una Adderley, Director of the National Wound Care Strategy Programme (NWCSP) comments:

"In September 2018, the National Wound Care Strategy Programme (NWCSP) was launched to optimise the care of people with wounds in England. The aim of the programme is to develop recommendations which support excellence in preventing, assessing, and treating people with wounds to optimise healing and minimise the burden of wounds for patients, carers and health and care providers.

The NWCSP is supporting several national initiatives to improve care for people with leg and foot ulcers (including venous ulcers). A Commissioning for Quality and Innovation (CQUIN) scheme has recently been introduced to financially reward community services that achieve goals for improving the diagnosis, assessment, and treatment of lower leg wounds. The NWCSP first tranche implementation sites are identifying the best way to introduce and establish new ways of working that ensure such goals are met. Recently, the Academic Health Science Network new national programme 'Transforming Wound Care' has begun working in partnership with the NWCSP to spread good practice across England. Together, these initiatives will go some way to addressing the unwarranted variation in care for people with lower limb wounds across England'.