Why we need to address the postcode lottery of wound care in the UK

Ellie Lindsay OBE FQNI (top), life president, Lindsay Leg Club Foundation; Julian Tyndale-Biscoe, senior partner, FINN Partners

The suffering caused by lower limb and leg ulcer-related conditions often languishes in the periphery of healthcare. However, the prevalence, distress and economic implications of these conditions are far more substantial than commonly acknowledged.

While significant strides have been made in wound care, the management of lower limb conditions across the UK remains inconsistent, resulting in unequal access to quality care. This underlines a pressing need for change, as highlighted in a parliamentary reception independently organised by Ellie Lindsay OBE and hosted by Derek Thomas MP on 26 April at the Houses of Parliament, which aimed to shed light on leg and wound care issues and spark a transformative dialogue.

The event marked the launch of a manifesto for change. Event attendees were urged to sign an online petition advocating for simple, yet impactful steps that could significantly elevate wound care standards nationwide. This reception acted as a wake-up call, amplifying the voices of countless patients and their families whose experiences had been marred by inequities in their treatment. The event was introduced by Roland Renyi, who played an integral role in developing the agenda and topics. Presentations included the following.

How did we get here? Wound care and its history

Professor Keith Harding CBE highlighted the history of wound care and current attitudes within the medical profession. He said that more needs to be done to raise the profile of this subject, to collect more data at the local and national level to analyse the numbers and costs. Professor Harding also called for more healthcare to be provided outside the hospital environment and for action to be taken now to stop what he referred to as a Cinderella condition.

Venous disease and its impact

Professor Alun Davies outlined the prevalence of venous disease as a major contributor to leg ulcers. According to Professor Davies, the substantial allocation of the healthcare budget to treat leg ulcers highlights the severity of the issue. He also addressed the need for collaboration between specialists and primary care providers so as to ensure effective interventions.

Challenges in lower limb revascularisation

Mr Lukla Biasi identified the critical challenges in lower limb revascularisation, where inadequate care for arterial conditions can result in grave consequences. He said that a multidisciplinary approach, prompt interventions, and improved accessibility to vascular services are crucial.

The challenge of wound care for the NHS

Jacqui Fletcher OBE provided a broader overview about the challenges we have with wounds. She pointed out how inaccurate some of the data is and how concerning this is, given the impact of lower limb wounds. Jacqui also highlighted the fact that 40% of wounds are lower limb wounds and only 7% are pressure ulcers, largely because with pressure ulcer management the NHS has a focus on prevention. Jacqui said we need to prevent where we can, ensure that those that do occur heal quickly, and prevent their recurrence. It's only if we do these three things that we can reduce the burden on those who experience the condition.

Living with a chronic wound — a qualitative approach

Dr Anna Galazka shared her research into the personal aspects of dealing with a chronic wound, derived from extensive time spent within the wound care community. Dr Galazka started with the physical aspects, pain, exudate, infection and smell, which patients have spoken to her about, describing one patient who stayed in their house for four years. Dr Galazka said we must not underestimate the power of the collective to bring about change.

Industry's role and collaborative efforts

Mike Steele explained the role of the Leg Club Industry Partners (LCIP), underscoring industry's position in

supporting wound care initiatives. The LCIP collaborates with the Lindsay Leg Club Foundation, contributing resources, education, and expertise to promote evidence-based care.

Nursing challenges and patient perspectives

Trudie Clark looked at the challenges faced by nursing professionals in wound care. She said that limited resources, inadequate interdisciplinary collaboration and deficient data capture hinder effective wound management. Trudi explained how patient perspectives illuminate the physical and emotional toll of chronic wounds, emphasising the importance of community support and education.

Personal experiences and advocacy

Karen Davey and Ann Clwyd MP (who has sadly passed away since the event took place) shared their personal experiences of living with chronic wounds and the inadequate care they received. These poignant accounts underscore the urgency for improved wound care systems that offer consistent and comprehensive treatment for patients.

Amidst the discussions, a stark contrast emerged between recent medical advances and the glaring disparities which persist in wound treatment. The term 'postcode lottery' resurfaced, underscoring the profound unfairness that patients can sometimes encounter during their journeys through wound treatment. Virtually all the testimonies highlighted distressing experiences, illuminating the gravity of the problem:

- Inconsistent and uncommitted treatment: patients recounted receiving sporadic and disjointed treatments from clinicians without any follow-up or continuity of care
- Lack of training for community nurses: the lack of training and rushed care in community settings emerged as a challenge, leaving patients exposed to below par treatment
- Lack of dressing context: dressings were often applied without a comprehensive understanding of their mechanisms and contextual appropriateness, undermining their effectiveness
- Neglectful treatment: some patients reported enduring poor and even inconsiderate treatment, betraying the essence of compassionate care that is the cornerstone of healthcare.

These presentations painted a nuanced picture of wound care, capturing both strides made and persistent challenges. Addressing these challenges collectively is pivotal, encompassing the need for accurate diagnosis, interdisciplinary collaboration, robust prevention strategies and sufficient resources. The significance of patient perspectives, data collection and awareness campaigns cannot be overstated. By collectively tackling these issues, the healthcare system can strive for enhanced wound management, reduced suffering, and an improved quality of life for patients.

A report which aims to cast a spotlight on these issues and advocate for immediate, comprehensive change is shortly to be published by the authors. Ellie Lindsay OBE asserts the fundamental right for every individual to access high-quality care for lower limb diseases and related conditions. This aspiration hinges on education, unrelenting advocacy and the united voice of the healthcare community, with Members of Parliament poised at the spearhead of driving change through the constituencies they serve.

The report will delve into the challenges and complexities surrounding lower leg wound care, particularly focusing on leg ulcers and their profound impact. Insights from our experts in wound care and patient experiences provide a comprehensive overview of the burden of leg ulcers, a comparison of wound care standards internationally, diagnostic and treatment challenges, and the vital roles played by both industry and nursing.

Enough is enough. This report is nothing less than a call for change, rallying the healthcare community to address the hidden epidemic of lower limb and wound care in the UK. It underscores the urgency of creating a more equitable and effective landscape for patients grappling with these conditions, and it galvanises stakeholders across sectors to collaborate and drive transformative improvements in wound care standards. JCN