

Health education and person-centred partnerships in an ageing society



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Leg ulcer management in the older person presents a number of challenges to the global health economy as the population of people over 60 is increasing rapidly, with numbers expected to escalate significantly over the next decade. A major demographic shift is unfolding and scientific and medical advances, population growth, change in societal age, compounded by a global shortage of nurses, will have an impact on lower limb management in the future. This has implications for the community nursing services, as local NHS providers compete to deliver a high-quality, efficient and cost-effective healthcare service. However, many of today's older persons are healthy and active, and many continue to engage in productive activities. Yet, it is predictable that the physical, emotional and financial cost of providing care for older adults will increase and that due to changes in family roles and structures, the care-giving situations will become more complex, requiring a change in practice.

Health services will need to seek new ways to support and encourage positive actions among the public to take responsibility for their own health decisions. They will need to inspire people to think about the implications of their health choices and potential benefits to them.

MAKING HEALTH CHOICES

Effective communication is a key component in promoting better health; it provides the basis for the development of a dynamic therapeutic and educative — person-centred — process in preparation for meeting the health needs of our society. Nevertheless, person-centred partnerships require clinicians to adopt a philosophical approach that is respectful of, and responsive to, the preferences, needs and values of those in their care. Practitioners have to accept and understand that both facts and emotions have equal importance in interacting with an individual and the building of a therapeutic partnership with them and their families, which is necessary when imparting health information.

There is evidence that decision aids that promote an individual's participation in health

judgements are beneficial. Most of which focus on the concept of individuals becoming informed about their clinical condition via education, helping people to lead more proactive and fulfilling lives. An example of this is demonstrated in the psychosocial Leg Club environment where the empowerment of its members dispels the traditional 'dominant nurse/passive patient' relationship; it ensures a true partnership and redistributes power within this person-centred relationship, increasing patient choice and control of care pathways. It also enables members to expand their knowledge, builds confidence and provides social connectedness by giving members opportunities to engage in meaningful activities. However, nurses must use this social environment to facilitate behaviour change that will lead to seeing individuals as 'whole persons,' addressing their perceptions and healthcare expectations. Over the past years, Leg Clubs have delivered person-centred care, documented in a number of case studies that showed where Leg Clubs and health education have made a difference to an individual's life.

PROMOTING PARTNERSHIPS

As an invited guest at the 20th EPUAP conference, I was extremely impressed with the Chairman's, Guido Ciprandi, emotional opening address in which he stressed the significance of sharing tasks and improving skills for all involved in the delivery of care. He emphasised the importance of placing individuals and their family/carer at the centre of care, while ensuring that healthcare workers in a hospital or community setting used an empathic approach with a heightened awareness of patients' needs, wants, motivation and goals.

In order to improve the lives of people, a major re-think of our current approach is required. Our healthcare systems must support individuals to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to manage their own health and care, and to support one another in the context of their wider families and communities based on a more collaborative, person-centred care.

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