Diabetic foot ulcers, the Legs Matter Campaign and much more!

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It is universally accepted that diabetic foot ulcers remain a major healthcare problem. They are common, result in considerable suffering, frequently recur and are associated with high mortality, as well as considerable healthcare costs (Jeffcoate et al, 2018). Yet, despite considerable advances made over the last 25 years, diabetic foot ulcers continue to present a very considerable healthcare burden.

With demographic changes, the over-65-years age group is increasingly living in social isolation owing to movement of their families, and communities are becoming more fragmented due to changes in the social classes. Loneliness and isolation can be major problems in both urban and rural communities, and people, for example, those living with diabetic foot ulcers, may experience a further sense of isolation and loss of social contact due to immobility, which ultimately leads to non-adherence to the recommended foot-care treatment.

Despite the high morbidity and mortality associated with diseases of the foot in diabetes and the costs to both healthcare providers and patients and their families (Cavanagh et al, 2012), these conditions have generally failed to attract the same level of interest from healthcare professionals as other diabetes complications. The author found a conference chaired by Professor Amit Gefen that addressed controversial issues and included a stimulating, interactive debate between the speakers and delegates relating to challenges in diabetic foot management to be both refreshing and informative, and attending this conference led the author to reflect on existing practice.

Professional experts and delegates from more than 28 different countries attended the first European Conference on Controversies in Diabetic Foot Management (Diabetic Foot-Europe) in Vienna, Austria. The theme throughout the conference was to encourage an open debate on controversial issues and question ritualistic practice in clinical settings in the field of diabetic foot management.

As an adult undertaking nurse training, the author was keenly aware that few practitioners were challenged regarding 'why do they do what they do', as many areas of practice were rooted in tradition, ritualistic care and institutional policies. However, based on the growing body of research, patient perceptions and complexity of care demand critical thinking in today's climate of global care. This involves the application of knowledge and experience to identify an individual's problems and to direct clinical judgments and actions that result in positive person-centred outcomes. Nonetheless, in order to enhance practice, sound evidence-based decisions must be made, and colleagues should be encouraged to critically appraise or examine the evidence from research studies and question findings.

Throughout the conference, eminent speakers shared controversial challenges and how they strived to move forward to enhance diabetic foot care and prevent amputations by questioning protocols and practice. For example, Dr Frank Bowling acknowledged that treatment of diabetic foot infections, especially deep-seated ones, remains challenging. He described how, over the past 4 years, he has led a research team that investigated the use of intravenous antibiotic therapy as dictated by hospital protocols and excessive hospital admissions and questioned the effectiveness of antibiotics as first-line treatment, with interesting results.

Practitioners should acknowledge the existence of ritualism and that the method of evaluation/critical reflection remains a priority and vital for continued development. Further, it is important to reflect on whether certain sections within a protocol are necessary or if these are outdated and require modification to bring them in line with the latest research.

The Lindsay Leg Club Foundation forms partnership with renowned phlebologist

The Lindsay Leg Club Foundation has recently formalised a working partnership with Professor Sergio Gianesini, internationally renowned phlebologist and President of the vWIN Foundation (Venous-lymphatics World International Network), with the aim of helping individuals with lower-limb conditions to achieve a better quality of life.

The purpose of this collaborative working partnership is to promote and exploit the fact that two third-sector organisations are working together to achieve the same goal. Over the past 2 years, Professor Gianesini has become a passionate advocate of the psychosocial Leg Club model of lower-limb care and has taken every opportunity to profile and promote both the model and this third-sector charity. The Foundation board are delighted to form this collaborative partnership with Prof Gianesini and the vWIN Foundation, as both organisations recognise the priority

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Ellie Lindsay and Sergio Gianesini

and importance of education in primary and allied healthcare for urban and rural communities in the UK and internationally.

Professor Gianesini will be attending the 2019 Leg Club Conference this September in Worcester to meet the board of trustees and patrons. He will also be joining fellow eminent speakers as an active participant in the 2020 conference to celebrate the 20th year of this annual conference.

Expansion of social Leg Clubs: social prescribing

One major challenge in ageing societies today is how to create meaningful pathways for older persons with lower-limb problems and/or leg ulcers to experience high-quality later-life living and contribute to society. Social prescribing is a social movement that requires a change of culture within clinical practice. The social prescribing model provides a personalised service. It is also a real attempt to address inequalities, because the people that social prescribing helps are often those with the poorest self-esteem, the lowest ebb of confidence and the least motivation. These are the people who most need resources and a reason to get out of bed every morning. Therefore, in today's NHS climate, it is an exciting, challenging time for those involved in addressing the problems of individuals living with a leg ulcer, with the ultimate aim of reducing healing times. With the emergence of the NHS social prescribing model, Leg Clubs have expanded fivefold already this year, and many are in the embryonic stage and will open later this year.

A key aspect of the psychosocial Leg Club model for lower-limb care is the relationship of care, in which people are both giving and receiving care. The model provides treatment, health promotion, education and ongoing care for people of all age groups who are experiencing leg-related problems within a social model of care in the community. Most people with lower-limb problems and leg ulcers are older, poor and alone, and it is a disorder that brings much suffering to the individual. Further, these individuals often have significant comorbidity, and these ultimately lead to social isolation for many.

The social Leg Club approach fulfils the social prescribing model as, thanks to the outstanding support of the clinical teams and their invaluable volunteers, it encompasses having somebody in a patient's life who cares about them and encourages them to exercise and have a good diet, all which affect mental health and wellbeing in a non-medical environment.

Legs Matter Week

Legs Matter and the organisations it collaborates with have made considerable progress by transforming the level of awareness of Legs Matter activities within NHS circles and with the public at large. As part of the coalition, the Foundation are actively promoting Legs Matter Week to all their Leg Club members, volunteers, clinical teams, trustees, friends and colleagues. Creative ideas have been effectively implemented by a motivated, collaborative team of colleagues from different disciplines and clinicians in hospitals and the community. Working together as a co-operative group, the collaborative Legs Matter partners have been able to remove barriers that may prevent success and have undertaken what is necessary to move the idea from vision to reality.

Save the date!

Over the years, the Leg Club Conference has grown to become an important venue for those developing and improving wound management, and it is a excellent platform for networking and sharing knowledge.

Do join us at '**Person-centred care: a question of balance?**' at Worcester Rugby Club, on **25 and 26 September 2019**. CWC

Jeffcoate WJ, Vileikyte L, Boyko EJ, Armstrong DG, Boulton AJM. Current challenges and opportunities in the prevention and management of diabetic foot ulcers. Diabetes Care. 2018; 41:645–652. https://doi.org/10.2337/dc17-1836

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