



Letters

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Your Turn pressure ulcer campaign

The issue and scale of pressure ulcer prevalence in the United Kingdom have increasingly been put under the spotlight in recent years. However, is this increased visibility enough to ensure that the majority of avoidable pressure ulcers (PUs) are prevented, particularly when many occur in the community setting, where little is done to educate the people at risk or those caring for them?

The Your Turn campaign has been working to highlight the issues around PU care and prevention for the past 8 years, but more recently has seen an increase in the number of enquiries from health professionals working in the community. Indeed many of our current projects involve care agencies, residential homes and social services — areas of health care where there is often a severe lack of training in the area of PU prevention.

One of the biggest challenges we face is that those who are most at risk of developing PUs are also those who are traditionally the most difficult to get to and educate. By working with community-based formal carers, we are able to offer assistance in the delivery of basic education to those most at risk; however, we believe there is still much more that can be done.

Last week, in a presentation at a hospital trust, the speaker asked about how information regarding PU prevention was disseminated to members of the general public. This was met with a stony silence, despite the personal interest in PU prevention of all those present, and it became apparent that educating other members of the health-care team was a vital

element in the fight to reduce avoidable PUs.

PU prevention cannot and should not be left solely to those with 'tissue viability' or 'wound care' in their job title. There is a desperate need to share the burden of education across all health professionals, with the opportunity to engage with a person who may be considered to be at risk.

We regularly see public health campaigns concerning obesity, smoking and heart disease, but PUs seem to still be kept under the covers. If you read about them in the paper, it's in highlighting a case of neglect or bad care. Instead, we want to see the media helping us to spread a message of prevention.

Given the right information and education, members of the public are able to take greater responsibility for their own health. They are less likely to refuse preventative treatment involving what they see as 'uncomfortable' mattresses and they can be helped to better understand the need to stay well nourished and hydrated.

Currently, the vast majority of the general public have little idea of what a PU is, what makes them become at risk of developing one and, certainly, very little idea as to the immense pain and suffering they cause, the length of time they can take to heal, or that they can, in fact, lead to death. Only by establishing a robust education campaign, using all available communication channels, can we change this situation.

PU prevention requires a multidisciplinary strategy that encapsulates everyone involved in the care pathway. This means all hospital staff, nursing and residential homes, care agencies, social services, clinical

commissioning groups, community nurses, general practitioners and practice nurses, as well as transportation services, such as the ambulance service.

If all these services collaborate on how to prevent PUs through education, then the results will be tangible. If the cost of treating one category IV PU can escalate to £40000,¹ then it becomes evident that having an education campaign in place that promotes prevention, rather than cure, is a cost-effective strategy that could reap significant rewards, both financially and, more importantly, at a human level.

Your Turn has developed a suite of tools to help community and hospital teams deliver the needed education through simple yet effective methods, getting to those people who are classed as being at risk. We need to spread the message of prevention to everyone, not just to those who are at risk, if we are going to affect change. Join us in promoting the message that, where PUs are concerned, prevention is most definitely better than cure.

C. James, Campaign Director, Your Turn.

References

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- 4 Guest, J.F., Taylor, R.R., Vowden, P. Relative cost-effectiveness of a skin protectant in managing venous leg ulcers in the UK. *J Wound Care*. 2012; 21: 389–398.