

PATIENTS WILL BENEFIT FROM STRONGER INTERDISCIPLINARY LINKS

David Gray

For the majority of healthcare specialists in the UK, life is often hectic and working through lengthy to-do lists more than fills the hours in each day. As a result of this we can sometimes become immersed in our own worlds, focused on meeting the clinical challenges directly in front of us and becoming detached from other specialties or mainstream healthcare.

As a clinical nurse specialist in tissue viability, I feel that this could certainly apply to me. I have faced numerous challenges in my own field and have not been blessed with as much time as I would have liked to interact with specialists from other related specialties from whom I could learn a lot.

Recent events have caused me to reappraise my practice and consider how much we may miss by failing to share our expertise, not just with those in our own spheres of influence but across other specialties. I was the chairman of some of the lymphoedema roadshows organised by Wounds UK in conjunction with the British Lymphology Society, The Lymphoedema Framework and supported by an educational grant from Activa Healthcare. During these events it became clear that I had much to learn regarding lymphoedema and its impact on the patients I see with cellulitis of the lower limb or advanced cardiac failure. The knowledge I gained during these events and from subsequent discussion with lymphoedema specialists has

encouraged me to make subtle changes to my practice, and I believe this has made a positive difference to my patients.

I also feel that those specialists working in the leg ulcer field managing large volumes of patients with leg ulceration with a lymphoedema component could also make a positive

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contribution to the management of these patients, which would be of interest to lymphoedema specialists. I hope that in the future we will see opportunities to exchange clinical experiences and information between related specialties such as lymphoedema, tissue viability/wound management and dermatology relating to the management of patients who may straddle the professional boundaries, such as those with lymphovenous disease and associated ulceration.

The use of modern wound management products is currently under the spotlight and it is one of many issues to be considered by the parliamentary health select committee's inquiry into NHS deficits. As this inquiry progresses, there is a need for related specialties to come together to ensure that the needs of our respective patients are

not ignored. While lymphoedema specialists do not use modern wound management products for all their patients, they are used in some cases. Should access to such products be restricted in the future, would the select committee think to discuss this with lymphoedema, dermatology or surgical specialists? Recent history suggests not as it is the tissue viability and wound management specialists who are more likely to be asked to comment on these matters.

It is important that the voices of specialists in lymphoedema management and patient groups such as the Lymphoedema Support Network are heard. To this end, a meeting drawing together representatives from a variety of specialties — including lymphoedema — who may have an interest in medical devices such as wound management products is currently at the planning stage. I hope that once this meeting has taken place the NHS decision-makers will be able to exercise their duties in full possession of the facts.

Communication between specialties in the UK would benefit from a greater commitment to build on the existing links and relationships, with a view to ensuring that all opinions are heard on common issues which affect our different fields. With modern methods of communication open to us such as websites and virtual meetings, such communication should be easier to facilitate than it has been in the past. The more we share information across professional boundaries, the more we will learn from each other. The patients we treat will be the ultimate beneficiaries. **JL**

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