Improving quality of life (QoL) for patients with chronic oedema and lymphoedema - partnership with industry.

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Aim
To highlight how a tissue viability service worked collectively with industry to improve quality of life for a patient with chronic oedema and lymphoedema post de bulking surgery. To show that industry can help provide useful support to clinical practice in terms of skill assessment and competence development.

Background
Chronic oedema and lymphoedema in non-cancer patients have not always been highlighted as an area of need. Yet in the community many patients suffer poor quality of life due to mismanagement of such conditions; until recently in most communities non-cancer lymphoedema patients were denied access to services aimed at managing these conditions (Moffatt et al., 2003; Hardy, 2006). This can be a direct result of lack of emphasis on the impact of such medical conditions on quality of life being highlighted in both medical and nursing schools (Williams et al, 2004, Davies, 2008). Therefore, acknowledging that a patient has chronic oedema and lymphoedema is important; however, it is more important that health care professionals understand the impact chronic oedema and lymphoedema can have on the patient’s QoL. This can only be achieved by setting up appropriate community services or pathways to capture these patients in order to address these clinical challenges. This case study aims at highlighting how a patient’s QoL was improved by the use of inelastic short stretch compression bandages and working with industry helped changed the way he views his life and how the world sees him.

Method
A case study based on a patient who has suffered with chronic oedema and lymphoedema for years. A literature search was conducted to retrieve publications which focused on the aspect of involving industry in the management of patients with lymphoedema and chronic oedema. All literature was retrieved from electronic databases, Cochrane Database of systematic review (2001-2011), British Nursing Index (2001-2011), CINAHL, (2001-2011) and MEDLINE (2001-2011). Allied literature was also searched due to lack of information on the involvement of industry in direct patient care.

Interview
Due to mismanagement of patient's condition he had become a subject for teaching to junior medical staff at the local hospital:

……I do attend yearly reviews at the hospital……which I find to be a waste of time as the consultant brings a group of medical students to have a look at my legs not offering anything……because I was young I went for the reduction, now all my confidence is gone as this is confidence destroying.……

At home he was being under compressed by community practitioners as they treated Lymphorrhea on both legs as venous leg ulceration, with the dressings offering poor fluid handling capacity:

……Before the district nurses came in my dressings used to be a wet nappy with fluid coming from the right leg……They wanted the bandages to look nice so they always made them look nice even without using the right technique……

Minicabs had started taking advantage of his condition, making him feel very vulnerable and uncertain of the future:

……each time I ride on the taxi they charge me double stating that I leave a bad odour in their taxi and it now needs valeting……

An improved QoL for the patient post the application of multi-layer cohesive inelastic short stretch compression bandaging designed for lymphoedema management, as shown on the pictures below. Community practitioners became confident and competent in oedema assessment post education and training from the industry representative, as they had to shadow her on each visit for the first few weeks. Patient is pleased with the current state of his legs, back on self-management, wearing flat knit compression garments - whilst considering going back to swimming as his confidence is increasing.

Conclusion
Given the current financial setbacks to healthcare systems across the world, close working with industry enables the provision of effective, efficient and timely assessments and treatment plans, thereby enabling improved quality of life for patients and equipping clinicians with better clinical skills.

References

* Actico® Cohesive Inelastic Bandage System from Activa Healthcare

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