My Venous Leg Ulcer: Patient Passport

Liz Ettridge, Tissue Viability Nurse, Tissue Viability and Wound Therapy Service, Medway Community Healthcare.

Introduction
The number of leg ulcer patient in the UK continues to grow and with this comes additional strain on the health service, both in terms of capacity and in the healthcare setting including leg ulcer specialist nurses, community nurses and practice nurses (Guest et al 2017). There is also a need to encourage patient empowerment through better knowledge of their conditions and greater involvement in their care as mentioned in the five year forward view (NHS England 2015).

As is common in the UK, the remit for care of patients with leg ulcers at Medway Community Healthcare (MCH) lies within the community nursing service. This includes running the leg ulcer clinics and seeing housebound patients. The difficulty in recruitment and retention of community staff has had an impact on lower limb management within Medway Community Healthcare. Tissue Viability provide in house training aimed at new staff in order to manage the issues of staff education in leg ulcer management. However, due to poor staff retention there is a lack of expertise among community nurses.

Method
Local Tissue Viability Teams have implemented Pathways of Care for leg ulcers to help guide nurses, however, staffing problems often meant leg ulcer clinics are staffed with inexperienced nurses who are not always confident to effectively educate patients.

Often the only person in attendance at every visit is the patient, therefore there is a need to invest in patient education to fully understand their leg problem and need for compression therapy, to enable full partnership in their management including the assessment process and plan of care. MCH have in the past introduced patient passports for pressure ulcers and catheter care, to enable education and continuity of care between health care settings.

In order to address some of the issues mentioned above MCH developed “My venous leg problem passport” which was introduced in similar way to those already in use.

The idea of the passport is to bring all the key elements of patient leg ulcer management together in one document. The passport contains patient education, including the rationale for the assessment, treatment options and aftercare. It is intended to enable the patient to have the understanding to take ownership of their chronic condition (expert patient). There is also an area to document the Doppler result and compression details and when and how to seek help. It is designed for the patient to be able to fill in their own details, to prevent added pressure on nursing time. The patient can show the passport to any health care professional in other settings, such as hospital admissions or while travelling, to give patient the confidence that their plan of care is being continued.

Conclusions
The booklets were first introduced to our champion link community nurses, while undertaking a level 6 lower limb module in March 2017. They then promoted their use and cascaded to all community nurses. On evaluation, they have proved very popular with patients and staff, particularly in the 4 leg ulcers clinics across the organization. It is too early to see if has impacted of healing rates.

Results
The booklets were first introduced to our champion link community nurses, while undertaking a level 6 lower limb module in March 2017. They then promoted their use and cascaded to all community nurses. On evaluation, they have proved very popular with patients and staff, particularly in the 4 leg ulcers clinics across the organization. It is too early to see if has impacted of healing rates.

“I know what treatment I’m supposed to have so can let the new nurses know” - Patient

“I often have no access to Doppler results in the patients house. If they have a passport I can see it before I apply compression” - SCN

“I love them, all my patients have them now and I often quiz them on their knowledge” - Champion

“as a newly qualified nurse, it also helped me to understand about venous insufficiency, I don’t feel so scared when I’m in the LU clinic” - CSN

‘it really helped me to remember what the nurse explained about my leg problem.” - Patient