What is the patient experience of healing in a hosiery kit?

THE PROBLEM

Leg ulcers can be particularly difficult to manage, with pain and exudate having a serious effect on patients’ quality of life, not to mention the difficulties of treatment with compression bandaging. We asked Ian Payne, a patient with a history of leg ulcers, to tell us how he found treatment with a hosiery kit. We also asked his nurse, Karen Hutchinson, a community nurse/wound clinic nurse in Walsall, how she approached his care.

THE SOLUTION

Although I have a clinical background, this reflection has been written from the perspective of my recent experience as a lay-person rather than as a nurse. Having developed an ulcer to my left leg following a previous deep vein thrombosis (DVT) in January 2014, I was unfortunate enough to develop another DVT in my right leg; this consequently led to immediate severe oedema and skin breakdown.

Following discharge from hospital, my ulcer was managed by the local practice nurse using wound dressings and analgesia. One thing that I will never forget is how painful the ulcer was — it was excruciating. While I appreciate that pain is a very personal experience and can be difficult to assess, it had a huge impact on my life.

After three months the wound was deteriorating and my leg continued to be oedematous, so I was referred to the local leg ulcer specialist service. The team there decided that I would benefit from compression therapy and this was started in May, 2014. At this point the ulcer was incredibly wet.

The prospect of compression bandaging was daunting at first, although eventually I got used to the bandages, resigning myself to the thought that they were something I just had to live with. They became almost part of me.

Despite the use of compression bandaging, the wound continued to progress slowly, largely due to ongoing issues with infection, but then in January 2015 the wound appeared to deteriorate significantly (Figure 1).

Due to the complexity of the problem, I was referred to a dermatologist who prescribed a course of prophylactic antibiotics. I remained on the antibiotic therapy for four months, which proved to be extremely helpful. From then on the wound began to improve and the oedema reduced, aided by the combination of bandaging and antibiotics.

HOSIERY KIT

In May 2015, my wife and I had planned to go on holiday, which raised the question of how I would be able to have my compression reapplied safely and effectively while we were away. By this point the ulcer had improved considerably — the leakage had reduced along with the oedema (Figure 2).

My specialist nurse Karen suggested I use a hosiery kit to overcome the issues around bandage reapplication while on holiday. Due to my history of oedema, an ActiLymph™ (Activa Healthcare) hosiery kit was prescribed.

As soon as I tried on the hosiery kit I felt relieved — not only was I able to go on holiday and independently care for my leg, I also continued to wear the hosiery kit when I returned home and, to my surprise, one month later the ulcer was healed (Figure 3).

Being able to wear a hosiery kit rather than bandages made me feel so much more human; more normal and civilised. The kit also felt more comfortable than the compression bandages and I could again do things...
that I once took for granted, like showering and wearing normal shoes.

As well as healing the ulcer, I feel that wearing the hosiery kit has helped me understand the rationale behind wearing compression hosiery and, in some way, has given me a greater confidence in what hosiery can achieve. I am going to continue wearing hosiery on both legs to prevent any further DVTs or leg ulcers. Karen also informed me about the evidence that has recently been published on hosiery kits, so I was pleased to find out that I was receiving evidence-based best practice.

I hope that relating my experience here helps clinicians to reflect on their practice and, in particular, consider using hosiery kits to deliver more effective and timely care for those with a leg ulcer. I also want to thank the nurses, particularly Karen, for being my advocate. I am now looking forward to a more active and pain-free future (in my hosiery of course!).

REFERENCES