Improving customer care in compression hosiery

**Aims of this training**

This CPD Guide, brought to you by Activa Healthcare, is designed to improve your knowledge of compression hosiery and venous and lymphatic conditions, and act as a CPD trigger. Specifically, this module will:

- Provide you with up-to-date knowledge on the different ranges of compression hosiery
- Explain the role of these products in maintaining healthy limbs
- Help you to ensure customers use the best and appropriate garment for their condition.

**Reflective questions**

Think about the following areas:

What is my understanding of the conditions that benefit from compression hosiery?

Which ranges of compression hosiery are available on prescription?

What role can pharmacy play in helping customers manage venous and lymphatic conditions?

The compression hosiery category has gone through a number of changes and developments recently. The introduction of new fabrics, knitting technologies and styles on the NHS provides customers with a greater choice of attractive, lightweight and easy-to-apply garments in different styles and colours which offer a solution in helping to manage any venous or lymphatic condition.

The introduction of these effective and cosmetically appealing garments means that many customers with chronic oedema, varicose veins or venous ulceration can now be treated and monitored within the community, instead of being hospitalised. As customers often have to wear compression hosiery for life, the pharmacist plays an important role in the care of the condition, ensuring that every customer has the appropriate garment to prevent any recurrence or deterioration of the condition and more importantly, helping them to lead a normal and active life.

Pharmacists and their staff are ideally positioned to help by:

- Looking out for customers who are not collecting their hosiery prescriptions
- Asking customers who are collecting repeat hosiery prescriptions if they are content with their garment and if it is helping their condition
- Being aware of any complaints of hosiery not fitting properly and digging in, which is causing discomfort
- Being aware of customers having difficulty putting on their hosiery
- Encouraging customers to have regular measuring sessions every six months to check that their hosiery size is still correct.

You should also look out for customers who are suffering from untreated swelling of the limbs, leg ulcers, bulging veins, or even changes in the appearance of the skin on their lower limbs. Explain to these people the use and purpose of compression hosiery in helping with these conditions and that they should seek advice from their GP.

**Use of compression hosiery in venous and lymphatic conditions**

Compression hosiery plays an important part in the management of chronic oedema and in the prevention and treatment of varicose veins by helping to reduce oedema in the lower limbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Benefit of compression hosiery</th>
<th>Customer benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Varicose veins</strong></td>
<td>Improves venous return of blood by: • Supporting weakened valves and vein walls, preventing backflow • Improving upward movement of blood.</td>
<td>• Eases symptoms such as pain, throbbing, swelling • Reduces swelling • Improves the appearance of unsightly, bulging veins • Reduces complications such as eczema, phlebitis.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)</strong></td>
<td>• Reduces risk of DVT developing • Enhances venous return by putting increased pressure on the superficial and deep veins of the limbs • Higher pressure placed at the ankle and less pressure at the knee encourages blood flow towards the heart • Reduces reflux and prevents oedema at the ankles.</td>
<td>Customers should wear compression hosiery from the start to the end of the day.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Chronic oedema (swelling in legs present for more than three months)</strong></td>
<td>• Enhances venous return by putting increased pressure on the superficial and deep veins of the limbs • Higher pressure placed at the ankle and less pressure at the knee encourages blood flow towards the heart • Reduces reflux and prevents oedema at the ankles.</td>
<td>• Helps to manage and control swelling • Reduces risk of complications such as skin changes • Minimises complications such as cellulitis • Improves mobility • Eases discomfort and pain.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Venous leg ulcers</strong></td>
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Selecting hosiery to meet customer needs

Pharmacists and their staff play a vital role in helping customers to use compression hosiery in the treatment and/or prevention of many venous and lymphatic conditions. The following examples are intended to demonstrate ways to help customers, and provide an overview of the types of hosiery that are available.

**Customer 1**

As you are handing out a prescription for a pair of Class 2 hosiery, the customer tells you that she is very reluctant to wear the hosiery as she finds them uncomfortable to wear and difficult to put on.

On checking, you discover she has not been measured for over 12 months. Therefore her legs need to be re-measured so she can have hosiery that fits comfortably as well as help manage her condition.

**Solution**

After measuring this customer, you could recommend she tries the new Activa Unisex Patterned Socks, which are stylish but still offer the maximum compression to help with her condition. The smooth and silky texture of the socks make them easy to put on.

**Customer 2**

A customer has lymphoedema associated with varicose veins. When handing in a prescription for thigh length stockings BS Class 2 thigh length, she says she doesn’t want a repeat prescription of the hosiery. On enquiring further, she tells you that she is ballooning out of her hosiery so she feels very uncomfortable as they are digging into her thighs. She is also having great difficulty putting them on. On checking her PMR, it shows that she has not been measured for at least 12 months. It is apparent that BS Class 2 hosiery is not controlling the oedema in her lower leg.

**Solution**

This customer needs to be measured again to ensure the correct size of hosiery is recommended. Then, contact the GP to explain the problem and suggest she tries ActiLymph European Hosiery Class 2 thigh length.

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**Activa BS Hosiery**

An effective range of compression hosiery to treat a variety of mild venous symptoms and early skin changes when there is no oedema.

**Customer benefits:**
- Available in thigh or below the knee styles
- Cosmetically appealing
- Comfortable, soft and silky to the touch
- Easy to apply
- Large heel sack and no restriction at the toes
- Supports and encourages venous return
- Wide range of styles and colours to match the different needs of customers.

**ActiLymph European Hosiery**

Chronic oedema is associated with the first signs of lymphatic failure and is a precursor to lymphoedema. ActiLymph hosiery was developed to treat and manage chronic oedema and lymphoedema after bandaging has reduced the swelling. Can also be used if leg ulcers are not responding to BS garment or if swelling is presenting.

**Customer benefits:**
- Helps increase venous and lymphatic return, aiding absorption of excess limb fluid
- Manages chronic oedema
- Specialist knit creates a stiffer garment that provides the ideal solution to fight and contain lower limb oedema by providing a more rigid cuff around the limb (similar to an inelastic bandage function)
- Elasticated heel and toe sack, offering compression and support
- Improves tissue condition
- Wider welt – helps the garment to stay in place.

For further information on the extensive range of Activa hosiery, please visit: www.activahealthcare.co.uk
Customer 3

A customer who has a long history of recurring leg ulcers presents a prescription for Activa Leg Ulcer Hosiery Kit. She wants to know what this is and hopes it is not those ‘thick Nora Batty stockings’.

Solution

Explain that she will be wearing two garments – a silky liner that is easy to apply, then a stocking that will glide over the liner. These two garments together will give the compression required for healing but without bulky compression bandages. This means she will be able to wear her normal shoes instead of oversized slippers and the hosiery will make her leg look normal, so people will not know she has a leg ulcer.

Activa Leg Ulcer Hosiery Kit

An effective and comfortable alternative to bulky compression bandages.

Customer benefits:

- Provides higher levels of compression that can be applied by the customer
- Saves nurses’ time, as the customer can self-apply the garments
- Encourages the use of the calf pump
- Allows normal footwear to be worn as bulky bandages usually mean the wearing of oversized slippers which cause the wearer to ‘shuffle’ as they walk.

“Provides customers with a greater choice of attractive, lightweight and easy-to-apply garments in different styles and colours.”
Customer care

Choosing an Activa garment

After measuring a customer for compression hosiery, use the Activa online Hosiery Selector to choose the ideal product. It can be found at: www.activahealthcare.co.uk

How to apply compression hosiery

Tips for customers on applying their hosiery:

- Try putting the hosiery on first thing in the morning before getting out of bed
- Wear rubber gloves to help grip the hosiery
- Suggest using the unique hosiery applicator from Activa – Actiglide. It is available on NHS prescription.

Caring for compression hosiery

All customers should be told that the hosiery is guaranteed for 100 washes or for three months. The garments should be hand or machine-washed at a maximum temperature of 40°C and not tumble dried. Also advise customers to regularly check their feet for hard skin or calluses or snagged nails that might damage the hosiery.

Caring for legs

Adopting a good skincare routine will help customers maintain the condition of their skin and prevent further complications such as ulcers. Customers should be advised to:

- Moisturise legs regularly
- Walk and exercise regularly
- Check their legs and feet regularly for any skin changes or sores
- Seek treatment for any knocks or sores.

Forthcoming module

Improving customer care in lower limb chronic oedema

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