

SKINtelligence: supporting good skin care across the health economy



Overview

Unacceptable levels of skin breakdown in the Oxfordshire local system were causing the specialist tissue viability services to struggle with an ever growing, and increasingly severe case load; but it wasn't clear where the harm was happening or what could be done to prevent it. Pressure ulcers, leg ulcers and skin tears cause pain and distress to older people and can be avoided by a systematic approach to prevention, assessment and early management; but this clearly was not happening in Oxfordshire. It seemed that there were a significant number of avoidable admissions and inappropriate referrals to tissue viability services which could be better managed if generalist staff across the system were working in a coordinated way.

Pressure ulcers, leg ulcers and skin tears... can be avoided by a systematic approach to prevention.

Project Aims and Methods

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Improving skin care is a catalyst to improving care of the elderly more generally, as good skin care includes nutrition, hydration, mobility, falls avoidance and pain management. Measurable improvements can only be delivered across a health and care system by involving all the key players in collaborative partnership. Our aim is to reduce the prevalence of tissue viability problems and to assess and manage harm earlier where it happens.

Our approach used the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) methodology which systematically evaluates harms, identifies those which were avoidable, and analyses their causes and ways to stop incidents happening again. This approach is supplemented by a training needs analysis to identify and fill gaps in knowledge and understanding, sharing learning to create local learning communities across the whole pathway. Increasing the involvement of patients and service users in each of the participating sites will ensure that this understanding is underpinned by measureable and reported improvements in the skin care of older people.

Findings

A number of specific outputs and outcomes can be identified which act as exemplars of wider system change and, specifically, a changing culture around patient safety. The initiative has resulted in the following outcomes:

- A developing safety culture ultimately benefitting patient care: demonstrated, for example, through staff in care homes visiting each other's homes to learn together – something we were told would not happen in such a competitive arena.
- More than 50 individual organisations are now working collaboratively to improve skin care.
- Dopplers have been bought in care homes to improve leg assessment (with industry support).
- A more proactive approach is being tested for patients identified as at high risk of skin tears, with an aim of avoiding all tears in this group.
- Improvements are being collected on a site specific basis, including using safety crosses to display visually and transparently the period since the last episode of avoidable harm. In one site, over a six month period, the number of avoidable pressure ulcers dropped from eight to two (75% reduction). In one of these months, there were no pressure ulcers at all at that site.

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75%

over six months

Recommendations

The challenge is to make this initiative self-sustaining, by giving each organisation the tools to continue to monitor improvements.

Other elements designed to make SKINtelligence sustainable in the long run include the development of a shared resource base and a National Competence Framework for skin care, badged jointly by both Skills for Health and Skills for Care, which sets out what is expected in terms of skills, and underpinning understanding, for staff at all levels in the combined workforce. Having defined what it is that staff are expected to know and do, a shared learning resource base needs to be developed; which offers training materials, policy guidelines, formulary information, and assessment and referral information; in a variety of media.

Working with Thames Valley Health Knowledge Team

This project was carried out by the Knowledge Team, with more than 50 partners from across health and social care including 29 care homes (nursing and residential), and supported by funding from Health Education Thames Valley. We can help you by:

- **Telling you more about SKINtelligence.**
- **Putting you in touch with IHI practitioners.**
- **Sharing our skin care resource base as it develops.**

Thames Valley Health Knowledge Team

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