Knowledge & attitudes of wound assessment, treatment & management amongst wound care professionals

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Background literature review and rationale

It has been suggested that nurses’ knowledge of assessment of wounds is insufficient to inform clinical practice (Hadcock, 2000; Hollinworth et al., 2008 and Barrett et al., 2009), yet others suggest that their knowledge base is good but not reflected in clinical practice (Maylor & Torrance, 1999; Ayello et al., 2005). Even though the knowledge base of nurses may have improved and wound assessment skills are appropriate (Ashton & Price, 2006), there is concern that knowledge is not always applied to clinical practice (McIntosh & Ousey, 2008; McCluskey & McCarthy, 2012). Less is known about professionals’ attitudes to wound treatment (Sessa et al, 2011), so the purpose of this study is to explore the link between knowledge and attitudes in the management of wounds, with a particular emphasis on honey.

Methods

A questionnaire with a descriptive quantitative design was used. Paper copies were disseminated and collected at wound healing conferences in Harrogate (November 2012) and Copenhagen (May 2013); an online version was advertised in wound care journals and via social media. Responses were collected until the 1st June 2013.

Questionnaire Distribution

The questionnaire was comprised of sections to obtain:
- sample characteristics including educational level, clinical experience and demographic data
- knowledge of wound care strategies, including wound assessment, antimicrobial treatments and choice of dressings. This section included 6 case study pictures (Figure 1) courtesy of the Wound Healing Research Unit, Cardiff University. Knowledge scores for the aforementioned areas in each section were calculated.
- attitude towards using honey based products. An attitude score was calculated with 1 as negative, 3 as neutral and 5 as positive attitude towards the use of honey.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to explore and examine the data. The analysis explored the relationships between demographic and psychological factors and attitudes towards the use of topical antimicrobial (honey) in wound healing. Analyses tested the differences between different professional groups.

Results

188 questionnaires were received. Findings indicated that wound care professionals (tissue viability nurses, other nurses, medics, other academics and podiatrists) had extensive overall knowledge in the assessment, treatment and management of wounds.

In wound bed assessment scores statistically significant differences between various wound care professionals were observed, with other wound care professionals scoring the lowest (Chi-14.92, df=4, p=0.005). Podiatrists on average had higher overall knowledge of wound care assessment, treatment and management knowledge than other professionals. All professionals had a neutral to slightly positive attitude towards the use of honey in wound care (Figure 2).

Discussion & conclusions

Wound care is an ever changing speciality. McCluskey and McCarthy, (2012) defined competence as how nurses interpret, integrate and apply their knowledge to practice. Since this impinges on patient care, it is therefore important to have consistent educational strategies for wound care. The availability of new devices, knowledge, practices and expertise presents problems to wound care professionals as they try to keep up to date with current best practice.

In this study the findings on general knowledge in relation to wound assessment, treatment and management was comparable to previous research. Podiatrists’ knowledge was on average better than the other wound care professional; this may be credited to their reported increased use of evidence based practice (EBP). Other professional groups appeared to be more strongly reliant on case studies and case reports. An increased level of education and years of clinical experience did not seem to affect attitudes of wound care professionals towards honey. It is important that best practices in wound care are implemented and that a high level of knowledge is maintained across the professions. The higher knowledge scores obtained by podiatrists may be attributed to their reliance on EBP. Perhaps all professionals should be encouraged to adopt this approach.

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References:


Figure 1 Wound bed assessment pictures included in the questionnaire (From left to right A: necrotic tissue, B: sloughy tissue, C: granulating tissue, D: overgranulating tissue, E: epithelialising tissue and F: infected tissue.)

Figure 2 Mean Attitude Scores amongst professions.