The patient’s compliance as a crucial factor in the wound care provision process – results of a longitudinal study

Dr. Roland Becker, Prof. Dr. Heinz Janßen
Institute for Health Care Economics (IHE)
Hochschule Bremen – University of Applied Sciences, 28199 Bremen, Germany
Phone: 0049-0421-5905-2763, Roland.Becker@hs-bremen.de or Heinz.Janssen@hs-bremen.de

Background

Chronic wounds are a widespread and very cost-intensive problem. An adequate care provision of chronic wounds therefore represents a big challenge both for the patients themselves as well as for society as a whole, particularly with an ageing society and the increasing cost pressure. The necessity to reinforce integrative care structures can be regarded as a very important task, especially in Germany as the division between the different health care sectors – particularly between the ambulatory and the stationary sector – is traditionally very high, which leads to meaningful losses with regard to the efficiency of the related care provision. The relevance of this issue appears even higher if chronic wounds are regarded as a major cause of morbidity in the population (Franks 2007) and if the impact of chronic leg ulceration on the patients’ quality of life is taken into account.

Methods

Within the scope of a multidisciplinary wound care provision, data on the patients’ quality of life, medical parameters and costs were systematically collected and analysed in the long-run. Then the outcomes were compared – isolated as well as a whole – between patients with a lack of compliance and patients with a sufficient compliance. A lack of compliance was defined by a clear and verifiable refusal of the wound care team instructions, independent from the specific reasons behind. The following figure shows the overall study design.

The inclusion criteria for being included into the study was the existence of a predefined chronic wound of any etiology. Moreover the patient’s had to be insured at the cooperating health care insurance. The period of investigation was from April 2007 to June 2008, the overall case number was N=46. The main characteristics of the study population were a high share of leg ulcer (54 %), an amount of 67 wounds (48 % ≥ 7 cm² wound size), an age of 74 years, a share of 56 % women, and a share of 62 % of people living alone.

Aim

Nowadays a multidisciplinary wound care provision system is often regarded as an optimal way to improve the treatment quality and, as a result, the patient’s quality of life, while reaching economic savings. It is, however, still unknown which impact the patients’ compliance might have in this context. The main aim of our study was therefore to investigate which impact a lack of compliance might have in the long-run on the treatment process and therefore on the wound care system as a whole.

Discussion

Our study revealed that the patients’ compliance has a high impact – similar to the effect of the general condition of the patient – on the wound healing process and related to that, on the treatment costs and the patients’ quality of life. Therefore, a holistic approach with a main focus on pain reduction and an improvement of mobility including further strategies to strengthen the patients’ compliance should be pursued. In this context, the specific reasons behind a lack of compliance should be considered. Only if the patients’ compliance is truly accounted for, a sustainable wound care provision including remarkable savings can be reached, while the risk of a system breakdown is simultaneously reduced.

For literature please contact author
Mail: roland.becker@hs-bremen.de

Results

All in all, our data analysis showed that the patients’ compliance plays a very important role for the whole wound healing process. For patients who showed a lack of compliance, the wound status showed a slight improvement in the beginning, but then changed significantly for the worse, almost back to the initial point (figure 2). The results related to the patients’ quality of life stay in line with this (figure 3).

With regard to the treatment costs, not only the general condition of the patient and a complete wound healing as an endpoint turned out to be a major influencing factor. Again the patients’ compliance was proved to be a very important and relevant factor.