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Media Release

Let's reduce the pressure

RUH nurses are this week launching a campaign to raise awareness of hospital and community acquired pressure ulcers and to reduce the number of pressure ulcers patients acquire at the hospital.

And as part of the 'Let's reduce the pressure' campaign, a Pressure Ulcer Awareness Week is running from the 24-28 May.

Kate Purser, Tissue Viability Nurse at the RUH said "We believe that most pressure ulcers are an avoidable complication of care and so we have developed a zero-tolerance approach to hospital acquired pressure ulcers. We have reduced the number of grade 2, 3 and 4 pressure ulcers from a rate of 11% in 2007 to 7% in 2009. Now we are aiming to reduce RUH-acquired pressure ulcers by 50% during the coming year.

Pressure ulcers are also known as pressure sores, or bed sores. They usually occur over bony prominences like the bottom, hip or elbow when the skin and underlying tissue becomes damaged. In some cases, pressure ulcers present a minor inconvenience that can be treated simply, however sometimes they can cause extensive damage to the skin, and lead to life-threatening infections.

People may be at risk of developing a pressure ulcer depending on their medical problems, nutritional condition, age and ability to move. Those who already have a pressure ulcer or have had one in the past are also at risk of developing another one. If a person is unable to move regularly - for example, due to illness, injury, or paralysis, pressure ulcers can quickly develop, sometimes over the course of a few hours.

During their stay in the RUH, patients are assessed to see if they are at risk of developing, or already have a pressure ulcer. This assessment is carried out on the day a patient is admitted and on a regular basis after that.

Kate says "A new pressure ulcer assessment tool was launched in 2009 and, since its introduction, our pressure ulcer care in the hospital has significantly improved. Ward staff report every patient who has a pressure ulcer and whether it is present on admission or develops during their stay."

Treatment to help heal pressure ulcers includes regular re-positioning / movement, wound dressing if required, removal of damaged skin, antibiotics or antibacterial dressings and/ or referral to the Tissue Viability team.

Kate adds "We want to cut the numbers of patients acquiring pressure ulcers in hospital, and effectively manage and treat those patients who come in to the hospital with pressure ulcers, often a side effect of another condition that they were hospitalised for.

"We provide high-specification pressure relieving mattresses and cushions for the prevention and management of pressure ulcers and we also have over 20 different wound dressings available.

"We also hope to help patients manage their own conditions by providing a new information leaflet for patients at risk of developing a pressure ulcer or those with an existing pressure ulcer."

ENDS

Some general advice to reduce the risk of getting pressure ulcers is:

Changing position

Making regular and frequent changes to your position is one of the most effective ways of preventing pressure ulcers. As a general rule, wheelchair users will need to change their position at least once every 15-30 minutes. People who are confined to bed will need to change their position at least once every two hours.

Nutrition

Eating a healthy diet that contains an adequate amount of protein and a good variety of vitamins and minerals can help prevent skin damage occurring and speed up the healing process. Try eating smaller meals throughout the day, rather than two or three larger meals and set a timetable for when you should eat, rather than waiting until you feel hungry, to ensure that you receive the nutrition that your body needs.

Quit smoking

If you are a smoker, giving up is one of the most effective ways to prevent developing pressure ulcers. Smoking reduces the levels of oxygen in your blood, as well as weakening your immune system, increasing your risk of getting pressure ulcers.

Notes to editors

Pressure ulcers are a widespread and often underestimated health problem. For example, in the UK, it's estimated that between four and 10% of all patients admitted to hospital will develop at least one pressure ulcer. For elderly people with mobility problems, the figure can be as high as 70%. Even with the best possible medical and nursing care, pressure ulcers can be difficult to prevent in particularly vulnerable people.

Pressure ulcers are given a grade identifying how deep it is; grades range from grade 1 – an area of discolouration, swelling or heat that won't go away, to grade 4 – a deep wound that may go down to bone.