

The Legs Matter campaign: looking back at 2020 and forward to a great year ahead



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The start of a new year tends to prompt two things: reflection of the year that has just ended and sharing hopes and plans for the year to come. It is no different for the Legs Matter Coalition team who met in January to do just this.

We started 2020 full of hope and excited about our plans, only to have these halted by the onset of the pandemic. Thankfully, the campaign only stuttered – the team regrouped and re-prioritised. Working around the clinical and personal demands incurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus became on information that would support the public and patients unable to attend clinics and health services as normal and health professionals concerned about the limitations of their input to ‘normal’ care.

The need and demand for online information and resources grew quickly from public and professionals. Quick responses to questions about COVID-19 in relation to lower limb problems were needed. So too was guidance on what was normal, how individuals could recognise when to seek help and supporting their efforts to adequately self-care. We share a common concern that people would delay seeking help and put themselves at further risk. Additionally, any help that would instil confidence in self-managing any lower limb condition and support preventative care helped to reduce risks and lessen the burden on health professionals.

Consequently, new resources and online content were developed and the annual awareness week was rescheduled and took place 12–16 October, with a predominantly digital content. Leanne Atkin, Chair of the Legs Matter Coalition reported in the previous issue on how we all ‘Got loud for legs’ and ‘shouted for legs and feet’ stating her firm belief that it had been a huge success, with so many joining and promoting the campaign activities and so helping to drive improvement and ‘reshape care’. There was a huge buzz about the week with 42 digital events and the image of Legs Matter Pink Flamingos taking to the streets, courtesy of the Lancashire & South Cumbria NHS Trust Tissue Viability Team was testament to the engagement of clinical teams across the country, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Legs Matter is not, however, a one-week wonder. We all take part because we want to make a difference, to make legs and feet really matter to people, to clinicians, to policy makers. We want to fill any information gaps, to challenge when care is ineffective or even harmful, to empower people with leg and foot conditions to expect better care and support clinicians to join us in challenging harmful care and making changes.

Such change takes time, but are we making progress? Have we got people listening? Have we got the messages right? Is all the effort worth it?

YES! YES! YES!

In terms of ‘getting loud’, raising awareness and reaching new audiences, the campaign is definitely succeeding and thanks to our public relations, website and social media analytics, we have the evidence! This is helping us understand what information and support people want and need and the results are enlightening and exciting. We hope it also encourages you to keep supporting Legs Matter, to use the resources and disseminate relevant links and information to colleagues and patients – if we can achieve the following results in the midst of a global pandemic, think what is possible in the future.

Public relations

Many of the patient stories were picked up by the press for follow-up, ensuring the key messages are continuing to reach many more people – potentially almost 450 million. In 2019, 20 articles were written, the estimated views of 109,000. We were thrilled with this. In 2020, 18 articles were written, including 11 stories about patients. At the beginning of January, the estimated views of Legs Matter articles was 1.15 million!

Not only was the 2020 campaign far-reaching, but it also suggests that we are gaining momentum, taking the right approach and getting better at getting the messages across. The media expert who advises the coalition has highlighted that using patient stories and health professional comment pieces carries much more credibility, authority and influence. Moreover, if we had sought to promote

Table 1. The 2020 Campaign results compared with 2019

Website traffic	Up 318%
Social Media clicks to the website	Up 1,705%
Google searches to website	Up 200%

the messages by advertising, it would have cost many tens of thousands of pounds (which we don't have). The figures quoted in this article are still growing as we anticipate other articles appearing in lifestyle publications that should stimulate wider interest. One of the patient stories will also feature on a local radio show.

Social media

For the first time in 2020 we had a small amount of budget to run some Facebook and Instagram advertisements — all of our growth on social media had previously been organic. The ads were placed around the Awareness Week, focussing on getting people to complete our 3-point leg check and to visit a healthcare professional if something didn't seem right. We had a reach of over a quarter of a million with 19,000 website clicks and over 1000 comments and questions.

Website use

There was a 318% increase in website traffic during and following Legs Matter Week when compared with 2019 (*Table 1*).

Our biggest users are the public, patients, family and friends by far. The information most often looked for relates to painful, throbbing legs and feet, reddish brown staining, ulcers, wounds that won't heal, cramp, dry itchy skin, cellulitis and swollen legs

and feet with almost 100,000 visits to some of these pages. We have continued to get well over 1000 hits per day on the site, that reflects an awful lot of concern, some of which may have been amplified by the pandemic and limitations imposed on some aspects of 'normal' care and support.

Steps for 2021

Thank you to all the members and supporters of our respective organisations and beyond, despite this being such a trying period of our lives. We truly appreciate you getting behind the key message that legs and feet are important, they need care and attention and when things go wrong, they get prompt assessment and effective interventions from knowledgeable and skilled practitioners. For 2021, maintaining the momentum is critical. Resource development, web development and social media campaigns are ongoing activities. Any sharing, reposting commenting and general interaction on social media are really welcome and help get the message out. Planning for the next big Legs Matter Week, 11–15 October 2021, is already under way and I hope you once again bring your commitment and enthusiasm to the week. Hopefully by that time, restrictions will have eased substantially and we can also get together and have a bit of fun!

A full programme of online events during Legs Matter Week will be supported by events across the year. Look out for a new hard-hitting publication, which is nearing completion, highlighting the action needed to effect real improvements in leg and foot care. Thank you also to my fellow coalition members, our marketing company, Pink and our corporate partners, without whom none of it would be possible.

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