

How shall we respond to the ageing population?



KAREN OUSEY
Academic Editor *Wounds UK*,
Professor of Skin Integrity at the
Institute of Skin Integrity and
Infection Prevention,
University of Huddersfield

Welcome to the November edition of *Wounds UK*. Once again, where has this year gone?! It has been a busy year for everyone, and that is even before we'll see winter and the extra pressures it can bring – flu, chest infections, victims of slips and trips due to ice, etc – which lead to the need for extra healthcare interventions. The rise in falls often leads to an increase in pre-tibial lacerations, skin tears and fractured bones, all leading to wounds. These patients often have comorbidities and will also have a reduction in mobility status that then leads to an increased risk of pressure damage. I know I have mentioned the ageing population in previous editorials, but I think it appropriate to revisit these figures to understand how UK demographics are changing. The UK population is projected to continue growing, reaching over 74 million by 2039; the population is getting older, with 18% aged 65 and over and 2.4% aged 85 and over; births continue to outnumber deaths and immigration continues to outnumber emigration, resulting in a growing population (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2017). You may be reading this and thinking 'In my area the population is quite young'; however, by 2036 over half of local authorities are projected to have 25% or more of their local population aged 65 and over (ONS, 2017). Many of the authorities with the highest percentage of older people are found in southern England. In 2016, over half of local authorities had over 3% of their population aged 85 and over. This is projected to continue increasing.

So who will care for the growing ageing population? Many of you reading this will be those caregivers, supported by other healthcare professionals, students, assistant practitioners and apprentices. However, can we adequately plan for resources that will be required to ensure that safe, evidence-based care is administered?

MISSING BURSARIES

This is the first year that bursaries for healthcare courses in England have been withdrawn, which

saw a huge amount of media coverage. *The Guardian* (Adam, 2017) reported that applications by students in England to nursing and midwifery courses at British universities fell by 23% after the government abolished NHS bursaries. Are we educating enough healthcare professionals to support the changing demographics? From a personal point of view, do we effectively prepare nurses, podiatrists and other healthcare professionals to recognise and be able to implement effective strategies to maintain skin integrity?

LOWERING THE CURRENT FEE CAP

The debate surrounding student fees continues, with the *Sunday Times* reporting that the Chancellor Philip Hammond is considering a plan to scrap the current fee cap of £9,250 for home undergraduates and replace it with a maximum of £7,500 (Griffiths, 2017). This could be considered good news for university students, but for universities this would result in a fall in revenue. I am sure the potential ramifications of this will be discussed and explored at length.

DESPITE THE UNCERTAINTIES, LET'S ENJOY THE CONFERENCE

Despite all the projections, uncertainties and anticipated deficits, there is still Harrogate to enjoy. Please take time to debate what the future of nursing and healthcare will look like over the next few decades. I would like a clear vision, as by that point I will be one of the older population!

WUK

Adam R (2017) Nursing degree applications slump after NHS bursaries abolished. *The Guardian*. Available at: <http://bit.ly/2kUYSkw> (accessed 2.11.2017)

Office for National Statistics (2017) *Overview of the UK Population: July 2017 An Overview of the UK Population, How it's Changed, What has Caused it to Change and How it is Projected to Change in the Future. The UK Population is also Compared with Other European Countries*. Available from: <http://bit.ly/2uuMcka> (accessed 31/10.2017)

Griffiths S (2017) Chancellor Philip Hammond set to slash university tuition fees by £5,000. *Sunday Times*. Available at: <http://bit.ly/2xNRdXG> (accessed 31/10.2017)