

The Legs Matter campaign: making legs (and feet) matter



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Operating under the governance of the Tissue Viability Society, Legs Matter is a coalition of eight healthcare charities and not-for-profit organisations (Accelerate, The British Lymphology Society, The Royal College of Podiatry, Foot in Diabetes UK, Leg Ulcer Forum, Lindsey Leg Club Foundation, Society for Vascular Nurses and Tissue Viability Society).

Foot in Diabetes UK (FDUK), one of the coalition members, is a multidisciplinary group with over 2,000 members. It is an organisation dedicated to continuous improvement in the care and management of people with diabetic foot problems. The aim of FDUK is to support health professionals to deliver high-quality clinically-effective care in order to improve the lives of people living with diabetic foot problems. For further information, or to become a member, please go to the FDUK website <https://footindiabetes.org>

The Legs Matter coalition believes:

- » Non-healing wounds of the leg and foot are one of the biggest health challenges of our time but it is a challenge that can be solved
- » Everyone has a right to good-quality lower leg and foot care that promotes healing and reduces the risk of harm
- » There is a need to improve awareness, understanding and treatment of lower leg and foot conditions
- » We can achieve more by working together than we can by working alone.

Someone with a lower leg or foot condition will encounter a number of people along their journey to diagnosis and treatment. The Legs Matter coalition exists to try and ensure that every single person on that journey, including the patient themselves, has the information they need to take the next best step towards healthy, pain-free legs and feet.

Non-healing wounds of the leg and foot are one of the UK's biggest health challenges. Despite this, conditions of the leg and foot do not currently

receive the care or attention they urgently need. Every day, thousands of people's quality of life is devastated by the lack of awareness, prompt diagnosis and correct treatment of lower leg and foot conditions. This can and must change.

The cost of care

A recent research study estimated that 3.8 million people in the UK have a wound that needs to be managed by the NHS — that's 7% of the adult population and a 71% increase from 2012/2013. The total annual NHS cost of wound management is £8.3 billion — an increase of 48% in real terms from 2012/2013. That's almost as much as the combined cost of managing osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis conditions (£10.2 billion). More than 40% of these wounds are leg and foot ulcers (Guest et al, 2015). Diabetes related foot ulceration alone costs the NHS around £1 billion per year (Kerr, 2017).

Leg ulcers are at least four times more common than pressure ulcers and care is too often inappropriate or too slow. (Guest et al, 2015). There is so much that can be done to heal wounds on the lower legs and feet, but frontline health professionals such as GPs, nurses and pharmacists may not be aware of the most appropriate prevention and treatment options.

Legs Matter Awareness Week

The Legs Matter Awareness Week first ran in 2019, aiming to signpost people living with chronic lower limb wounds, or those caring for them, to the information and services that can help them get the help they need. While the overall response to the awareness week was overwhelmingly positive, it also gave rise to an alarming number of questions and concerns from the public. These highlighted issues of poor public awareness about the seriousness of minor skin breaks, inflammation or swellings, and delays in seeking help. Some also reported poor assessments, delays in effective treatment initiation (especially appropriate compression), inadequate pain relief, support and

advice, and persistence with ineffective treatments (Sneddon, 2019). This feedback reinforced the need for the Legs Matter Campaign to go on.

This year's Legs Matter Awareness Week is scheduled for 11–15 October 2021. Full details can be found via the Legs Matter website <https://legsmatter.org/legs-matter-week>. Please do have a look at what is on offer and how you can get involved. What you can do in your area to make a difference? Imagine how much money we could save if we gave patients the right care.

As Margaret Sneddon, from the British Lymphology Society wrote (2019), we hope many of you will be a part of the drive to change the landscape: by earlier identification and presentation of problems, prompt and consistent assessments and interventions, including appropriate compression, and a better understanding of the profound impact on those with lower limb wounds, ulcers, swelling or infection. Success in these areas would not only reduce unnecessary suffering, complications and the number of amputations required, it would make better use of professional resources, resulting in significant savings for the NHS. If you haven't already done so, take a look at the website at <https://legsmatter.org/>

We cannot afford to be complacent, the economic and social burdens of chronic wounds continue to increase. Collaboration is starting to see changes, and the recently published National Wound Care Strategy Programme (NWCS, 2020) suggest that implementing the NWCS Lower Limb Recommendations will significantly reduce leg ulcer prevalence and the cost of leg ulcer care. Implementation will also reduce the proportion of

time health professionals spend delivering wound care and reduce the costs of drug prescriptions, hospital admissions and wound care products. While these results should interest healthcare providers and commissioning organisations, implementing the recommendations will also improve patients' quality of life, and morale and job satisfaction for clinicians (Adderley, 2020).

The eagerly anticipated Legs Matter coalition consensus document "*Making Legs Matter: a case for system change and transformation in lower-limb management*" (Atkin et al, 2021) will further support the case for wholesale change. It is a hard-hitting document, and the coalition makes no apologies for this. It is hoped that this document will enable us all to play our part in driving change and truly transforming the status quo. Make sure it is your next read!

WUK

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