

Striving for clarity in the provision of dressings

Delyth Bailey

The dressings market is extremely complex. Some product groups, such as wound dressing pads and gauze swabs, have attained a generic status and, because they are so well established, there is little required in the way of product training and support. When making a buying decision for these products, the key factor to consider is how well the product works.

Products in other categories are closely linked to education, training, sales and marketing. As a buyer, I am keen to understand exactly what I am purchasing and the lack of clarity is often frustrating. It inevitably leads to the question: 'Is the NHS getting the best value out of the products it purchases and the training and education that is delivered alongside them?' A key challenge for us all — buyers, clinicians and suppliers — is to provide more transparency in this area.

The key questions are:

- ▶▶ What level of support is required?
- ▶▶ Who is best placed to deliver this support?
- ▶▶ How should support be allocated?

There is currently little funding available to support clinicians with their ongoing education and training in dressings. Suppliers have traditionally filled this gap, often combining sales and marketing with education and

training. Although there are examples of clinically-informed, unbiased training being delivered by company representatives, there is no established standard or any quality control.

In a recent survey of bandage suppliers, the cost of delivering a day's training ranged from £100–300. Although the nature of these training days may differ, it does raise the question: 'Do suppliers deliver cost-effective training?'

As a buyer, I am keen to understand exactly what I am purchasing and the lack of clarity is often frustrating. It inevitably leads to the question: 'Is the NHS getting best value out of the products it purchases and the training and education that is delivered alongside them?'

While the supplier is the obvious choice to deliver brand-specific training, should generic training be their responsibility and do they provide it at minimum cost? We can be sure that the costs associated with training are built into a product's price, so customers are effectively paying for training when they purchase a product.

However, it is not always clear how much of the product cost is apportioned to training costs. Next time you receive training from a product supplier, ask how

much the event has cost and consider what proportion of your product bill has been used on training. In reality, the allocation of training and education provision will be hard to calculate and suppliers do not often offer a rationale for the way that it is allocated to customers.

Truly independent training provision would require a change to the funding mechanism and this seems unlikely to occur in the short term.

The NHS Supply Chain Dressings Team is trying to gain some clarity about what is being offered by suppliers. In future tenders, suppliers will be requested to describe any training and education provision that is offered alongside a product. Suppliers will also be asked to clarify how support will be allocated to customers, for example whether extra education support is available to higher spenders in addition to a basic training package.

The NHS Supply Chain Dressings Team are committed to delivering quality products at the lowest cost by engaging with our stakeholders every step of the way. If you would like to get more involved with the buying decisions that the NHS Supply Chain are making, please visit stand 88a at Wounds UK 2006, and sign up to join the stakeholder group. We look forward to taking your views on board. [WUK](#)

Delyth Bailey is NHS Supply Chain Dressings Category Manager, Dressing Category Manager, NHS Supply Chain, Chester