

Clinical experience is the key to evidence-based purchasing

Financial constraints in healthcare are not a new phenomenon, nor are they limited to the UK. Public and private healthcare providers across the globe continually face the challenge of providing appropriate and effective 'gold standard' clinical care to patients while also considering cost, medical priority, and overall efficiency.

The wound care industry also faces numerous challenges to meet the varied needs of its customer groups, from the regulatory authorities who approve products for use, patients, healthcare professionals, purchasers, buyers and advisors who may also play a significant role in deciding which products will be on reimbursement lists, tariffs, contracts, formularies, or guidance.

Reimbursement is the process by which healthcare products or associated services are paid for by a private or public healthcare provider. Products can be paid for in the UK at a national, regional or local level through several different routes including the Drug Tariff, direct purchase, contracts, tenders, and diagnosis-related group (DRG) tariffs.

The reimbursement manager or specialist at a wound care company determines the most appropriate route of funding or payment for each product and provides the supporting information and evidence needed to secure and

maintain funding. They should have a good understanding of each product from a technical, clinical and 'health value' perspective, as well as knowing what information decision-makers may require. Payment systems and funding routes may change, so an understanding of government affairs and public or private health policy is also required.

When making any purchasing decision for wound care products, it is important for healthcare providers to consider the future development of wound care, both as a clinical speciality and in terms of product innovation.

Clinical experience and a multidisciplinary approach are critical to efficient and effective purchasing of wound care products. The perspectives of the patient and their carers, healthcare professionals, and the purchaser or payer need to be considered carefully and can be compiled as an agreed list of requirements in order to help make the most appropriate decisions. After all, how can a healthcare provider judge whether they are receiving good value for money from any wound care product if they have not agreed and clearly specified their needs before they make their decisions?

Any purchasing review group will need to consider the clinical outcomes for each wound care product, as well as the impact they may have on resources (both human and financial). In order for purchasing decisions to be made ethically, this process

should be based first and foremost on the local clinical experience of each product, which should then be supported by appropriate evidence, explaining how local outcomes were achieved and how they can be maintained.

It should be clearly understood by all members of a purchasing review group that different patient types and healthcare environments may justifiably require different outcomes from a choice of wound care products. Healing as a primary outcome may also need to take a back seat to practical management of the patient's needs and wound symptoms, especially in chronic and non-healing wounds. In terms of overall value for money and cost-effectiveness, healthcare providers should also consider that it may be the way in which wound care products and healthcare staff are used to deliver care that will make the biggest impact on their budget, rather than the unit cost of individual products. Ongoing and appropriately targeted education regarding the choice and use of wound care products in clinical practice is invaluable, as is clinician feedback.

Finally, when making any purchasing decision for wound care products, it is important for healthcare providers to consider the future development of wound care, both as a clinical speciality and in terms of product innovation. It is an inevitable fact that purchasing decisions made today will directly influence the future of wound care throughout the UK and across the globe, tomorrow and in the years to come. **WUK**

This editorial was independently written by a reimbursement specialist in the wound care industry