

Skin integrity and wound management education in the pre-registration nursing curricula



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For many years there has been a drive to characterise what student nurses need to know about skin integrity and wounds (Holloway et al, 2018). However, the complexity of curriculum design has made this challenging, in part because the 'Future Nurse' (Nursing and Midwifery Council [NMC] 2018) needs to know so much! So, is right to push the agenda for one speciality at the potential detriment of others? Equally there is a valid argument that maintenance of skin integrity could help to reduce the risk of other conditions, for example pressure ulcers (PU), moisture associated skin damage (MASD) and skin tears. While progress seems to have been slow in terms of pushing the skin and wound agenda in pre-registration education, in my opinion we are making headway.

The publication of the Future Nurse: Standards of Proficiency for registered nurses (NMC, 2018) redefined the expectations of a newly registered nurse. Set out as 'platforms' these include:

- » Being an accountable professional
- » Promoting health and preventing ill health
- » Assessing needs and planning care
- » Providing and evaluating care
- » Leading and managing nursing care and working in teams
- » Improving safety and quality of care
- » Coordinating care.

Providing and evaluating care, includes being able to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and ability to act as a role model for others in providing evidence-based, person-centred nursing care to meet people's needs related to mobility, hygiene, oral care, wound care and skin integrity (NMC, 2018). Standards related to wound care and skin integrity are further operationalised in four areas

- » Observe, assess and optimise skin and hygiene status and determine the need for support and intervention
- » Use contemporary approaches to the assessment of skin integrity and use appropriate products to prevent or manage skin breakdown
- » Use aseptic techniques when undertaking wound care including dressings, pressure bandaging, suture removal, and vacuum closures
- » Use aseptic techniques when managing wound and drainage processes (NMC, 2018).

I think many of us felt that these standards did not go as far as we hoped, in terms of being more explicit, but there is no doubt they were a start. Furthermore, for those working in nurse education, whether that be within a university or clinically as a practice supervisor/assessor, they provide a foundation to build on.

In addition to the NMC Standards there is now a published Wound Curriculum for Student Nurses (Lindahl et al, 2021). Developed jointly by the European Wound Management Association (EWMA) Education Committee and Teacher Network, with representation from educators within the UK, this curriculum corresponds with the European Qualification Framework (EQF) Level 4. In combination with the full series of EWMA curricula (Pokorna et al, 2017; Probst et al, 2019; Holloway et al, 2020) it can be adapted to meet the competencies expected from Level 4, through to Levels 5 (Diploma), 6 (Degree) and 7 (Masters). The curriculum was developed using a Delphi process with engagement from members of the EWMA Teacher Network across the globe and represents a huge step forwards in terms of defining what a registered nurses needs to know about wound management.

The curriculum is designed in a modular structure and includes 15 units of study. The units of study include principles of 'skin and wound care' (8 units) and 'applied skin and wound care' (7 units). Principles of skin and wound care includes;

- Anatomy and physiology of the skin
- Skin care
- Wounds and wound healing
- Assessment of patients and wounds
- Wound management (cleansing, debridement, wound bed preparation)
- Dressings
- Wound microbiology/infection
- Wound pain.

Applied skin and wound care principles includes:

- Acute wounds
- Surgical and trauma
- Pressure ulcers (PU)
- Moisture-associated skin damage (MASD)
- Skin tears
- Venous leg ulcers (VLU)
- Ischaemic leg ulcers
- Diabetic foot ulcers (DFU).

Together the NMC standards and the EWMA Level 4 curriculum provides educators with an opportunity to embed skin integrity and wound management across the theoretical and clinical of the pre-registration curriculum. Work on this has already been undertaken by Lecturers in the School of Health and Society at the University of Salford who now have a 'Getting Wound Care Right Week' (Stephens, 2022). Colleagues in Switzerland have also undertaken work on implementing the Level 5 and 6 EWMA curricula into their Degree programme with great success (Bobbink et al, 2022).

I'd like to finish by drawing your attention to one other resource that can be used to support pre-registration education. The National Wound Care Strategy Programme in conjunction with NHS Health Education England (HEE) have developed a suite of online wound care resources with Level 4 learning outcomes. The Essentials of Wound Care Education programme is available as interactive modules for those working in

health and care (e-lfh.org.uk, 2022). There are six modules currently including;

- Skin care
- Wound assessment
- Leg ulceration
- The foot at risk
- Digital wound imaging
- Pressure ulcer prevention.

Taken as a whole, the standards, the curriculum and the modules provide the necessary building blocks to improve skin integrity and wound management education, but on their own they are not enough. Navigating the complexities of curriculum design and re-design is challenging so let's all work together to find solutions and share best practice in order to continue to raise the profile of wound care and skin integrity in pre-registration education.

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