**WOUND CARE FOR HEROES RETROSPECTIVE AUDIT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PILOT SPECIALIST COMPLEX WOUND CARE SERVICES IN THE UK FOR VETERANS INJURED Whilst SERVING THEIR COUNTRY**

**Authors:**
- Claire Stephens, Complex Wound Manager, Woundcare4Heroes
  Email: claire@woundcare4heroes.org.uk
- Lesley Street, Burns and Plastic Specialist Nurse, Woundcare4Heroes
  Email: lesleystreet@woundcare4heroes.org.uk
- Keith Moore, Complex Wound Manager and Nurse, Woundcare4Heroes
  Email: keithmoore@woundcare4heroes.org.uk

**Supporting authors:**
- Professor Sir Keith Porter, Professor Keith Harding, Professor Liz Cot Steve Jeffrey and Professor Peter Vowden

**Introduction:**
Woundcare4Heroes (Wc4H) launched in 2012 with a vision to initiate a national network of specialist complex wound management and educational services corroborating with the National Health Service (NHS) in upholding the veterans covenant to provide lifelong support and access to appropriate care for those traumatically injured in the Armed Forces. The charity mission is not exclusive to those injured in current conflict yet those injured in Afghanistan are regarded as a high priority cohort.

The tangible number of injured service personnel returned from Afghanistan and casualties of injuries sustained had not previously been quantified or reported and no clear discharge liaison pathway was identifiable to facilitate care transition between the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and NHS. Furthermore, no continued single point of contact, veteran covenant priority service or consistent pathway existed nationally within the NHS to permit speedy and appropriate referral for on-going complex wound management, wound prevention strategies or progression monitoring relating to traumatic ballistic injury.

Wc4H deployed a strategic approach to quantify the clinical need and steer the development of service provision and educational offerings to fulfill their charity objects.

**Methodology:**
- Operation “Radar” - exploration of the number of critically injured and category of ballistic injuries of those treated at Royal Centre Defence Medicine through the retrospective study of audit data sources during the past decade.
- A discharge liaison pathway development and MoD joined-up working link was established.
- Westminster Veteran Covenant Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) links established.
- Operation “Service” - clinical capacity aligned to geographical locations of clinical need.
- Veteran referral triage pathway development.
- Clinical service, triage and RBL veteran health and well-being link pilot.
- Education and training related to ballistic injury supported by MoD provision of military speakers.

**Results and Discussion:**
The retrospective data revealed throughout of injured service men and women returning from Afghanistan and readmitted for follow-up surgery between 450 and 700 per annum. Presenting overall numbers in excess of 7700 critically injured being received and treated at RCDM Birmingham during the past decade. Injuries are essentially divided into two groups: being Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast or gunshot origin. Data relating to specific injury types and number of amputations will now be further extrapolated and utilized to further scope management, prevention and monitoring strategies and support National Institute of Health Research innovative research opportunities to benefit our combat injured for the future.

The MoD have deployed new strategies to ensure service leavers understand the importance of registering with a GP practice and Wc4H has become a recommended charity for veterans to link to when leaving military service.

Three Wc4H centres have been established in Bradford, Birmingham and Cardiff, linking via a secure telemedicine and research system. Wc4H Wales is leading pilot rapid access clinical services via a new facility within the Welsh Wounds Innovation Centre (WWIC).

A coded triage system has been developed led with the assistance of a former RAF Medical Emergency Evacuation Team (ASSERT) response paramedic to ensure newly received veterans access appropriate levels of support from onset via the correct centre or outreach service which can be deployed immediately. Wc4H Wales and Royal British Legion Veterans Health & Well Being Wales have linked to accelerate access to wound care and mental health support through the initiation of cross referral processes between the two charities.

Wc4H will further explore and utilise the extrapolated data to assist Westminster in the scope of the new veterans covenant relating to wound management to ensure a consistent approach is taken nationally.

Education and training events have been supported by the MoD and piloted through both the Territorial Army and NHS. The education model is currently being cascaded nationally to provide practitioners with a greater understanding of traumatic combat injuries and provide an underpinning knowledge of on-going ballistic injury care requirements.

**Conclusion:**
The audit data revealed significantly greater numbers of combat injured receiving care at RCDM than initially anticipated and has led to further scoping and a new strategy for provision of Wc4H charity services. Wc4H have been briefed regarding MoD plans to discharge their injured into NHS care and plan for the first 450 of the cohort to form the foundation of the service pilot studies through Wc4H Wales and enable Wc4H national services to cascade and develop to receive the remainder of our injured veterans in the future.