MANAGING THE MULTIFACETED COMPLEX TRANSITIONAL NEEDS OF VETERANS RETURNING TO CIVILIAN CARE

Authors:
Claire Stephens, Complex Wound Manager
Founder and Chief Executive Officer,
Woundcare4Heroes
Email: claire@woundcare4heroes.org.uk

Lesley Street, Burns and Plastics Specialist Nurse and Vice Chair, Woundcare4Heroes
Email: lesleystreet@woundcare4heroes.org.uk

Major Keith Moore, Complex Wound Manager and
Operational Chair, Woundcare4Heroes
Email: keithmoore@woundcare4heroes.org.uk

Introduction:
Woundcare4Heroes (Wcare4H) is a registered charitable organisation which launched in 2012 with a mission to initiate a national network of specialist complicated wound management and educational support corroborating with our NHS in upholding the UK Veterans Covenant for Health. Wcare4H aims to provide a consistent point of contact and a lifelong pathway of support to access appropriate treatment and care for our veteran community.

Development of an easily accessible single point of contact, veteran triage and priority referral pathway to facilitate consistent streamlined care nationally permitting rapid and appropriate referral for on-going management of injury related conditions, progression monitoring and wound prevention strategies have been the key focus of our charity activity during 2014.

Method:
The following pillars of support have been employed as key focus areas by Wcare4H and four diverse veteran cases are presented to showcase these support pathways in practice.

- Operation Veteran Awareness
- Operation Health Care Practitioner Awareness
- Clinical service enhancement – Radar, Triage and charitable support administered
- Education and training
- Wcare4H Champion Campaign

Results:
Veteran A:
28 year old, history of explosive injury. Wounds were fully closed but it was evident that this veteran has extensive underlying functionality concerns and excessive scar management issues. Awareness raised regarding the need for continued surgical intervention, access and availability of further surgery and a streamlined pathway was implemented to facilitate immediate rapid referral directly to the surgical team and additional charity support through the provision of specialist burns and scar management garments. An ongoing monitoring, implementation and single point of contact pathway is now fully operational for this veteran.

Veteran B:
30 year old, previously supported through two episodes of surgical care by Wcare4H who then developed a rapid onset of PTSD. This veteran utilised the single point of contact to Wcare4H due to experiencing difficulty accessing mental health support attributable to the lead time or type of services being offered. The risk of further wound development was so great that Wcare4H assisted in the funding of an immediate mental health assessment and support for this veteran whilst waiting to access the mental health services. This veteran did not develop further factitious wounding complications due to this interim support offering.

Veteran C:
36 year old, bilateral amputee who had developed pressure damage to both his Ischial tuberosity’s and hip. All pressure redistribution equipment and regimes were in place but this veteran was experiencing dressing failure due to leakage, skin stripping and rolling of the dressing upon transfer from bed to wheel chair. The practice nurse was supported and the dressings were changed to a highly absorbent, gentle non adherent, conformable product which was robust enough to withstand the transfer techniques deployed by this veteran and a barrier film was added to the regime for peri wound protection. The veteran reported that he was more easily able to transfer, that the dressing did not move or leak and this had given him confidence to leave his home periodically.

Discussion and Conclusion:
The veteran cases that have been presented demonstrate the multi-faceted needs of our injured veteran community. Often a small input such as a discussion with a general practitioner or nurse offering advice, support or reassurance to the veteran or their family themselves can have a huge impact on the pathway the veteran then follows. Wcare4H will continue to raise awareness amongst our veteran community, provide traumatic injury related educational support and enhance our NHS services to further develop the single point of contact. Through the implementation of our national Wcare4H champion campaign which aims to grow the number of practitioners nationally linked to the radar and triage tools which have been developed by wcare4H.