



The Intersection Of Patient Safety And Wound Care: A Strategic Approach For Optimal Outcomes

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Patient safety is a cornerstone of high-quality health care, yet the intersection between patient safety and wound care often remains underemphasized. Pressure injuries, surgical site infections, and other wound-related complications are preventable harm that can lead

to prolonged hospital stays, increased health-care costs and diminished patient quality of life. An integrated collaborative approach that prioritizes wound prevention, promotion, and management is essential to improving patient safety and outcomes.

The prevention, promotion and management of wounds requires a comprehensive systems thinking approach that integrates evidence-based practices, interdisciplinary collaboration with expert wound-care practitioners, early access to treatment and a patient-centred care approach. This article explores the intrinsic link between patient safety and wound care, emphasizing strategies to minimize risk, enhance prevention efforts, and optimize positive outcomes.

The Link Between Patient Safety And Wound Care

Wounds, whether acute or chronic, pose significant risks to patient safety. Poor wound care practices can result in infections, sepsis, pain and impaired mobility, leading to adverse events, such as hospital acquired pressure ulcers (HAPUs) and surgical site infections (SSI). These conditions are largely preventable through proactive safety measures, yet they remain prevalent in health-care settings, in the community, and worldwide.

According to Wounds Canada, “the overall prevalence of pressure ulcers (PU) across all health-care settings was 26%, with approximately 70% of these wounds considered preventable”¹ Recent scholarly literature also underscores the critical importance of proper wound care management to prevent these outcomes.² The Canadian Institute of Healthcare Information (CIHI) reports, “Patient harm in Canadian hospitals occurs in 1 in 17 hospital stays...47% were related to bedsores and medication errors, 31% were related to infections like surgical site infections”³

This, and other data,⁴ reinforces the magnitude of patient harm relating to the incidents of pressure ulcers and preventable harm. A comprehensive patient safety strategy that aligns with a learning health system and patient engagement framework for wound prevention

and management can drastically reduce these risks and improve patient safety outcomes.

A comprehensive patient safety strategy that includes wound prevention and management can drastically reduce these risks.

Wound Prevention: A Proactive Patient Safety Approach

Prevention is the most effective strategy for enhancing patient safety in wound care. Key components include:

- **Risk Assessment:** Regular skin assessments using validated tools help identify at-risk patients early.
- **Pressure Injury Prevention:** Frequent repositioning, appropriate support surfaces and skin protection strategies reduce the incidence of pressure injuries.
- **Moisture Management:** Controlling incontinence and excessive moisture helps prevent skin breakdown and irritation.
- **Nutrition Optimization:** Adequate protein and micronutrient intake is essential for maintaining skin integrity and promoting healing.

Wound Promotion: Educating And Empowering Stakeholders

Enhancing wound prevention and management requires a culture of safety where health-care professionals, patients, and caregivers are well-informed and engaged.

Key strategies include:

- **Health Care Provider Education:** On-going training in best practices for wound assessment, dressing selection and infection control reduces complication.
- **Patient and Caregiver Engagement:** Teaching and engaging patients and caregivers about wound prevention,

early warning signs, and self-care fosters shared responsibility for wound-care management.

- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Encouraging collaboration, team-work and communications among nurses, physicians, physiotherapists and wound-care specialists ensures comprehensive care.
- **New Models of Care:** Innovations in recent hospital—to-home programs, where discharge from hospital to home includes wrap-around health-care services and timely care, will optimize wound healing and the potential for readmission to hospital.

Wound Management: Evidence-Based Strategies For Safety And Healing

Effective wound management is critical for ensuring patient safety and achieving optimal outcomes. Best practices include:

- **Timely and Accurate Diagnosis:** Early identification and classification of wounds facilitate appropriate treatment plans.
- **Appropriate Dressing Selection:** Choosing the right dressing based on wound type (foam, hydrocolloid, antimicrobial) promotes healing and reduces infection risk.
- **Infection Control Measures:** Adhering to aseptic techniques, monitoring for signs of infection, and using antimicrobial therapies, as needed, prevent complications.
- **Monitoring and Documentation:** Consistent tracking of wound progress ensures timely interventions and prevents deterioration.

The Role Of Health Care Leadership In Wound Care Safety

Health-care executives and policy makers play a vital role in integrating wound care into patient safety initiatives. A great example of system

collaboration and leadership worthy of replicating is the Pressure Ulcer Awareness Program (PUAP).⁵ The PUAP is a provincial multi-stakeholder quality improvement initiative led by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care of Ontario, Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO), Wounds Canada (formerly the Canadian Association of Wound Care), Health Quality Ontario (Now Ontario Health) and 30 participating Long-Term Homes (2006). The initiative was designed to shift the focus from treating existing pressure ulcers to preventing them, a goal that has influenced practice.

Conclusion

The intersection of patient safety and wound care is a critical focus area for improving health-care quality, and to reduce the significant health concerns in Canadian health-care settings. By emphasizing prevention, education, early access to treatment and evidence-based management, health-care systems can significantly reduce wound-related harm and enhance patient outcomes.

A call to action is urgently needed and can be positioned to mobilize quality improvement collaboratives across sectors to galvanize an integrated process and pathway for wound care safety. Optimizing lessons learned from the PUAP and other wound-care safety initiatives that shift the focus and place the emphasis on the collaborative relationship between acute, primary, and home and community care, while simultaneously, increasing the quality improvement capacity in the health-care workforce, will reinforce a prevention and promotion approach to wound care. This combined with strong leadership and patient engagement are key to fostering a culture of safety in wound care. As health care continues

to evolve, integrating wound prevention and management into patient safety frameworks that highlight practical steps will be essential for delivering high-quality, safe, and effective care.

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