National accolade for Aberdeenshire Community Nurses

A team of five Community Nurses from Turriff have achieved national recognition for their innovative treatment for a severely wounded, elderly patient which saved her from a leg amputation.

They were part of the NHS Grampian team which was the first in the UK to use a vacuum pump to treat a severely damaged leg, and they gained 'Highly Commended' in the 'Innovations' category of the prestigious annual Wounds UK Journal awards.

Jane Tait, Senior Community Nurse, is based at Turriff Medical Practice and led the local team. She says wound management is a daily part of work, but this case posed major challenges, involved lengthy personal nursing, and also telemedicine:

"The patient had an almost completely ulcerated leg, and had a complex range of conditions which impeded her ability to heal. She didn't want an amputation and was keen to be at home."

So, with support from NHS Grampian's Department of Tissue Viability, Jane, Jackie Sopel, Elsie Anderson, Sharlene Greig and Sheila Clark worked in pairs to remove and replace anti-microbial dressing, and refit a vacuum pump system for draining the fluid from the wound three times week over ten months.

"The extent of the wound meant that no dressing in the land could cope with the amount of fluid which needed to be drained, but the vacuum pump not only did that job, but also ensured there was no pressure on this large painful area.

"Our patient was able to stay infection-free and at home while the wound improved."

The nurses learned how to use the pump via the telemedicine clinic at the Department of Tissue Viability in Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. They liaised with the clinic as the patient progressed, providing detailed updates via an e-clinic, and eliminating the need for the patient to make regular 70-mile round trips for clinic reviews over the months.

"We were all very pleased that our patient's quality of life was significantly improved. To have this national award is fantastic recognition of a small rural
District Nurse teams' work," said Jane. "We are a forward-thinking, motivated team in Turriff, willing to embrace the challenges facing Community Nursing where more people needing care are choosing to be at home."

David Gray, Clinical Nurse Specialist, Department of Tissue Viability, NHS Grampian, spotted the opportunity to use vacuum pump technology combined with the Department's innovative telemedicine clinic:

"I saw the patient in hospital originally and gauged that using a vacuum to drain fluid would be effective at home, with a major input from the local nursing team, and support from the telemedicine clinic. This resulted in excellent clinical results and vastly improved the patient's quality of life.

"This is an example of great teamwork, involving hospital specialists and the community team and we are all delighted and proud that the professionalism shown by the Turriff team is being recognised in these national and highly respected awards."

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