



Diabetic Foot Time Bomb

The diabetic foot syndrome claims every year 28,000 amputations and numerous deaths. A large portion of complications were avoidable by the means of better care.

About 300,000 people with diabetes type 1 or 2 suffer from the subsequent disease diabetic foot syndrome (DFS). Because this sickness is often unrecognized or wrongly treated, the complication rate is extremely high: 28,000 amputations are connected to the diabetic foot syndrome in Germany every year. About 90 percent of the patients older than 75 years are dying due to the consequences. This alarming balance was drawn by diabetologists and care experts at the specialist conference "Wundversorgung bei Diabetes" (wound care for diabetes) on May 6th in Berlin.

Due to lack of knowledge: 80 – 90 percent of the amputations could be avoided.

The early and precise intervention action is the all decisive question with the diabetic foot syndrome. Once a chronic wound is established bone deep and is infected, the rescue of the foot is getting increasingly difficult. "Especially with old people a circulatory disorder always adds to initial polyneuropathy, which worsens the wound healing dramatically", reported the diabetes specialist Dr. Sybille Wunderlich from the hospital Helios Klinikum Emil von Behring in Berlin.

Therefore a timely diagnosis is essential. Nevertheless a diagnosis is made more difficult because the foot is warm and rosy looking due to widened vessels, however, in truth it is poorly supplied with blood.

On top of that, the patient doesn't feel a wound due to the damage of the nerves and therefore seeks medical advice only far too late. „Aside from an optimal adjustment to the metabolism, regular foot inspections and a pressure relief of the foot belong to an essential care of a diabetic“, underlined Wunderlich.

However, this is exactly where on a day to day basis the practice routine reveals its shortcomings. Many doctors lack sufficient knowledge on the disease and an interdisciplinary treatment structure is missing, which is prerequisite for an adequate treatment, believed the experts in Berlin. This way the problem is delayed until often an amputation is the only way out left.

The Berlin Foot Network: Multi-professional connection shall improve treatment results

For that reason the Berlin Foot Network was founded in 2010. Through networking among all participants within the treatment process, the foot network wants to improve the treatment structure in the region and with that the treatment of the patients. The role model is the Cologne foot network, which achieved a significant decrease of amputation rates in the Cologne area. „What we need are structured co-operations, structured treatment pathways and a structured documentation, which is mandatory for all fellow players“, reported co-initiator of the Berlin foot network Dr. Ralf-Uwe Häußler, resident diabetologist in Berlin. „The data will finally provide transparency both about the treatment quality as well as about the costs.“ 30 practices and hospitals already signaled interest, also the AOK Nordost is aboard with an IV-contract. Ambulant care services, shoe makers and specialized chiropodists should gradually be incorporated.

Technically the connection of all fellow players does not pose a problem these days. Under the headword „information chain management“ IT-experts already found a way, how data – independent of PC-infrastructure – can be read and worked with by every participant. Like IT-expert Falk Huneke, managing director of Jalomedtec GmbH, reported, that currently IT-specialists develop together with the university Osnabrück an electronic wound letter, which should evaluate therapy processes during DFS treatment. With this project a sensitive gap should be closed within therapy management: The creation of transparent and available data in the whole of Germany. After all data transparency is, in the eyes of the diabetes specialists, the basis to largely improve the therapy of the diabetic foot syndrome long-term.

New Therapy Options from the Research Pipeline

While optimizing the treatment structures is currently one of the most urgent tasks for diabetologists, researchers search for the medical breakthrough. Thus far one unsolved treatment problem of chronic wounds is for instance the oxygen transport. „The diabetic foot ulcers have an increased demand for oxygen, is the wound infected, the demand multiplies”, reported Dr. Häußler. Therefore, new research approaches concentrate on local oxygen therapies. Hygiene specialist Prof. Axel Kramer of the university hospital Uniklinik Greifswald is expecting significant therapeutic potential for this approach as well as for the development of tissue tolerable plasma (TTP) – however, currently neither of both procedures is available to patient care.

The concluding advice is that at present every long-term diabetic should turn to a specialized diabetes center or a diabetes practice.

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