

NET-BASED GUIDANCE FOR IMPROVING ULCER CARE

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Background: The Department of Dermatology at the University Hospital of Norway, in collaboration with Norwegian Centre for Telemedicine, offers Net-based guidance to health staff in the municipal health service. Project period: 1 Jan. 2006 – 30. December 2008

Aim: The objective of the study is to investigate whether an offer of regular Internet guidance helps to improve the quality of ulcer treatment in the home-care service.

Method: The project includes 16 patients with chronic leg ulcers. The participants were recruited from patients with leg ulcers who were receiving treatment from the Department of Dermatology. Participation in the project included a consultation at the Department of Dermatology together with the health practitioner with primary responsibility in the municipal health service, before the Internet guidance began.

The participants answered a questionnaire at the start and at the end of the guidance period. A selected number of nurses were interviewed.

Preliminary results: Internet communication with attached photographs made it possible to intervene immediately if the status of the ulcer changed. For many ulcer patients, rapid intervention resulted in faster improvement in the condition, and in certain cases it is assumed that the intervention prevented the need for hospital admissions.

During the project period, health staff from the home-care service improved their competence, felt more confident when providing treatment, and, with time, gained greater skill in making their own assessments. The patients felt greater confidence in the treatment given than they had previously experienced.

From an adviser's perspective, providing guidance using Internet communication with image attachments is easier and results in better learning outcomes than telephone enquiries. Individual counselling also provides the opportunity for advising participants on the basis of their level of knowledge.

Conclusions/discussion: A key objective was to increase competence in ulcer treatment in the home-care service. From being limited to performing treatment procedures that had already been prescribed, the health staff became capable of undertaking independent assessments of the development of the ulcer, and to propose or initiate necessary measures. They therefore become confident and more competent practitioners.

Use of information and communications technology (ICT) will increase in the coming years, which in turn will influence the use of ICT-based health services. At the same time the population of elderly people will increase, and the incidence of leg ulcers will rise correspondingly. Internet guidance creates opportunities for the application of a practical instrument that increases competence and saves resources within treatment for leg ulcers in the future.