

## News from the German Wound Healing Society (DGfW)

The German Society for Wound Healing and Wound Treatment (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Wundheilung und Wundbehandlung DGfW) was founded in 1994 as a non-profitable society, with the aim of improving the treatment of acute and chronic wounds, through supporting the transfer of knowledge between research and practice.

Over time the society has grown to around 1.500 members. The strongest group in the society is nurses (around 50%) incl. academic nursing with PHD degree, followed by around 30% doctors and 20% members from various areas of medicine, medical companies and healthcare professionals such as physio- and lymph-therapists, orthopaedic shoe makers, podiatrists and others. This shows the great diversity of the DGfW members.

The DGfW holds its own annual 2-day congress normally in June and supports some regional meetings on wound healing and wound care in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The last congress took place in Koblenz from the 13th to 14th of June with the theme: *"Dialysis – Diabetes - Wound Healing, Chronicle of an announced limb loss"* (*Dialyse - Diabetes – Wundheilung, Chronik eines angekündigten Beinverluβtes*). With over 60 scientific presentations and more than 1.000 participants, the congress was very successful. The coming congress will take place in the city of Kassel on the 26th and 27th of June 2009. The congress motto is: "Fascination: Lymphology and Compression" (*Faszination Lymphologie und Kompression*). The congress language is German, with some additional English sessions, where guest speakers present their work.

DGfW publishes the official journal of all German-speaking wound healing societies, including those from Austria (AWA) and Switzerland (SAFW), the ZFW - Zeitschrift für Wundheilung (means Journal of Wound Healing) six times a year. A Medline listing is an aim for the future.

Within the last few years there were several key achievements for the DGfW:

➤ Membership in the Association of the Scientific Medical Societies in Germany

In contrast to most European countries, Germany has a structure of scientific medical societies that are together under an umbrella organisation the AWMF (Association of the Scientific Medical Societies). The AWMF is the driving force behind evidence-based medicine in Germany, with 153 medical member societies, part of the Council for International Organization of Medical Sciences, WHO/UNESCO since 1949. The DGfW was accepted in 2005 as a member of the AWMF and is the only accepted member society in the field of wound healing. The AWMF umbrella organisation helps its members to publish guidelines, education papers and other evidence-based medical work. Those publications are undertaken through a consensus process with other medical societies within AWMF. Therefore those papers have a high importance and prestige in German medicine.

➤ Education in Wound Healing

The dissemination of a consistent high level education to all practitioners involved in wound care is fundamental to improve the quality of care. In 2008 DGfW developed an evidence-based wound-care curriculum that was approved by three AWMF consensus conferences involving 78 representatives of academic, research, medical and nursing wound-care societies, as well as patient groups. The wound-care curriculum consists of two different courses. A wide spread training program offers scientific, medical and nursing knowledge. The first step offers 84 hours of training leading to get the 'Certified Wound Assistant' degree (WA cert) and the second step offers 236 hours to the degree of a 'Certified Wound Therapist' (WT cert).

The letters 'cert' abbreviates certified and stands for an accredited certification process, according to European rules.

Up to November 2008, 156 nurses and doctors have passed step one and 30 students have passed step two in several

training centres in Germany. DGfW is responsible for training the trainers and controlling the exams.

➤ Guideline

According to the AWMF standards (see above) the DGfW is working on an evidenced-based guideline concerning the topical treatment of chronic wounds in patients with severe risks. The estimated release date is 2009.

➤ New definition of the nursing profession

In Germany the definition of the nursing profession is currently being redefined. In this case DGfW is working together with health authorities for the new arrangement and definition of the nursing profession.

➤ Research

The DGfW supports scientific work with two Awards given during the annual national congress through direct sponsorship. The current supported research fields are antiseptics and basic molecular research in wound healing.

➤ Refund for qualitative high level wound care

The current German health system allows an 'extra refund channel' called 'integrated treatment'. DGfW is in intensive negotiations with the regional health insurances in order to increase the refund for the treatment of chronic wounds based on the DGfW education (see above) and an interdisciplinary treatment access.

Looking at the health system, Germany, like in most other European countries, has severe financial problems, although medicine in Germany is still practiced at a very high level in the public sector, when compared internationally. However, a lot of drastic changes have taken place within the last years. One of the most striking changes was the introduction of a modified Australian DRG (Diagnosed related Group) system in 2003 including a complex calculation algorithm of fixed diagnose related refunds.

Due to limited resources in the German health care system, changes are still ongoing and it is difficult to adapt to it. For example, the former promoted 'integrated treatment' (see above) will be cancelled in 2009 with an announcement only few months in advance, which will not allow the practicing nurses and doctors to build a stable refund base. Due to those changes and to the lack of salary increases of doctors and nurses, a lot of medical and nursing staff have been leaving the country.

Unfortunately, the classic chronic wound patient finds himself in a quite 'weak patient group' which gets less attention from the political health sector, although the costs for wound treatment are high and have been ever increasing. In addition to that, the costs of wound healing are particularly difficult to be refunded due to an incomplete coding system for wound healing.

This explains why one major aim of DGfW is to attract more attention for wound healing in the political and public sectors. Political lobbying could change the basis of the refund system in order to attract more nurses and doctors to the wound healing field. The basis of all nursing and medical staff should be a high qualification in wound care, aiming for shorter treatment time and a higher success rate in order to save money! Therefore, the DGfW educational activities play a key role for future actions.

This aim to improve the representation of wound healing in medicine through education as the first step is already used in some European countries and is reflected in the EWMA University Congress Model. It could be used for all European countries as a basis for improving the importance of wound healing in the health systems.