

## Diabetic Foot Problems

Diabetic foot problems are complex, requiring input from orthopaedic surgeon, endocrinologist, infection disease consultant, vascular surgeon and podiatrist. It is therefore best managed by a multi-disciplinary team comprising all these specialists and including counselors, nurses and therapists. Diabetic foot teams taking care of inpatients jointly and running diabetic foot clinics have been shown to reduce the rate of major lower limb amputations (below knee and above knee amputation) significantly. The formation of such multi-disciplinary teams in hospitals in ASEAN countries and the running of diabetic foot clinics are therefore encouraged.

The long term strategy for management of diabetic foot problems is to improve foot screening, footcare and education on footcare and diabetes at primary healthcare level. There is a need for setting up special foot screening clinics in polyclinics to screen the foot "at risk" and direct them for early foot care by podiatrists and also to provide education on footcare and diabetes care. This requires support at the governmental level since the formation of such clinics requires much manpower and clinic space.

Likewise at hospital level, diabetic patients seen in endocrine clinics and non-orthopaedic clinics should also receive foot screening to diagnose the "at risk" foot and provide podiatric care and footcare education.

By screening all diabetic patients in polyclinics and hospital non-orthopaedic clinics, one can reduce the number of patients presenting to us with major diabetic foot

problems, thereby reducing the rate of major lower limb amputations. The problem faced by all ASEAN countries is the lack of podiatrists to run these foot screening clinics in polyclinics and hospital non-orthopaedic clinics. One way to overcome this is to provide dedicated nurses with specialised training to perform foot screening, foot care education, wound care and education on diabetes care. Such courses are best conducted by the multi-disciplinary teams for diabetic foot problems that exist. Once the need becomes great, such courses can be conducted nationally and eventually, with collaboration amongst ASEAN countries even regionally.

Recently, the management of diabetic foot problems has received better attention by the formation of an Asia Pacific Association for Diabetic Foot Problems in November 2004 during the First National and Regional Conference on Diabetic Foot Problems hosted by the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, National University of Singapore, 20-21 November 2004 in Singapore. The Second Regional Conference will be organised by Malaysia in 2005, the third by Indonesia in 2006 and the fourth by Hong Kong in 2007. By holding such regional conferences, interest groups will find such meetings a useful forum to discuss common problems, share each other's experiences and update each other on latest technology available. This will lead to improved care on the management of patients with diabetic foot problems.

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