

Health and Social Care Select Committee Inquiry: Prevention in Health and Social Care

The role of podiatry in preventing a wide range of often debilitating or life-threatening conditions is an overlooked element of delivery of care in the UK.

The role of podiatry in preventing excess deaths from diabetic foot complications

Approximately 4,000 people die every year following a lower limb amputation.¹ More than half (2,200) of these deaths could have been prevented if a podiatrist had been involved in their treatment.² It is expected that 1 in 10 adults will be living with diabetes by 2030,³ It is inevitable that the number of patients at risk of diabetic foot complications, ulceration, infection, minor and major amputations, and sepsis, will rise exponentially. By 2025, an estimated 1.2 million people with diabetes in the UK will require regular podiatry appointments if they are to remain ulcer and amputation free.⁴

Podiatrists are skilled and trained in the prevention and management of diabetes-related foot complications. They must be at the heart of NHS plans to eliminate unnecessary amputations and consequent avoidable deaths. The broader cost of diabetic foot ulcers is costing the NHS more than £1 billion a year. Equivalent of just under 1% of the entire NHS annual budget.⁵ Prioritising effective and early intervention for diabetic foot complications prior to ulceration, could save thousands of lives and millions of pounds each year.

The role of podiatry in stroke prevention

Podiatrists are ideally placed to carry out opportunistic checks for undiagnosed atrial fibrillation (AF).⁶ Opportunistic podiatric detection of AF does, and will continue to, prevent avoidable strokes. Without treatment, people living with AF are five times more likely to suffer a stroke. In addition, the presence of AF increases the risk of remaining disabled after a stroke by almost 50%. This can have a devastating impact on a person's life.⁷

Cases of asymptomatic AF may only be detected by the presence of an irregular pulse. An irregular pulse can be identified in the lower limbs as well as the upper limbs. A podiatrist examining the legs or feet is often the first to detect it.⁸

There are some 12,500 AF-related strokes in England every year, and the total costs for treating them is £150 million in the first year. Projections suggest that between 1.3 and 1.8 million people in the UK will have AF by 2060. This constitutes a considerable public health burden and a significant causal factor in the future prevalence of strokes across the UK.⁹

The role of podiatry in managing Peripheral Arterial Disease

Peripheral arterial disease (PAD) is present in 20% of people aged 60 and over. It is associated with mortality rates of around 30% at 5 years and in its most severe form, amputation rates of 25% at 1 year. Early detection and treatment of PAD by podiatrists can save limbs and lives. People with this condition are often under-diagnosed and under-treated, resulting in largely preventable mortality and amputation. People presenting with suspected PAD in primary care are often referred unnecessarily to vascular specialists within secondary care. Up to 80% of referrals for vascular assessments do not usually require surgery and can be triaged to podiatry led services. Podiatrists have the skills and training to treat PAD thus reducing unnecessary hospital referrals and ultimately preventing unnecessary amputations and excess deaths.

¹ <https://rcpod.org.uk/news/the-college-of-podiatry-welcomes-call-for-specialist-footcare-teams>

² Blanchette, V., Brousseau-Foley, M. and Cloutier, L. (2020) Effect of contact with podiatry in a team approach context on diabetic foot ulcer and lower extremity amputation: Systematic review and meta-analysis - journal of foot and ankle research, BioMed Central. BioMed Central. Available at:

<https://jfootankleres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13047-020-0380-8> (Accessed: January 31, 2023).

³ Carter, W. (2021) 1-in-10 adults living with diabetes by 2030, Diabetes UK. Diabetes UK. Available at:

https://www.diabetes.org.uk/about_us/news/1-10-adults-living-diabetes-2030 (Accessed: January 31, 2023).

⁴ Royal College of Podiatry, 2021. Saks Report. London: Royal College of Podiatry, p.11. Available at:

<<https://rcpod.org.uk/saksreport?msclkid=37ea17b3a6ac11ecbf30069fce60dc4d>> [Accessed 15 March 2022]

⁵ Mottolini, N. (2022) Diabetes and lower-limb complications a thematic review of clinical ..., NHS Resolution.

Available at: <https://resolution.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Diabetes-and-lower-limb-complications-slides-FINAL.pdf> (Accessed: January 31, 2023).

⁶ <https://rcpod.org.uk/the-college/position-statements/podiatrists-detection-of-atrial-fibrillation>

⁷ Carmine, M. et al. (2005) Contribution of atrial fibrillation to incidence and outcome of ..., Stroke. Available at: <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/01.STR.0000166053.83476.4a> (Accessed: January 31, 2023).

⁸ <file:///C:/Users/MatthewSpencer/Downloads/The%20role%20of%20podiatry%20in%20tackling%20MSK%20disorders.pdf>

⁹ Lundqvist, C., Kirchhof, P. and Lip, G. (2011) What are the costs of atrial fibrillation?, Europace : European pacing, arrhythmias, and cardiac electrophysiology : journal of the working groups on cardiac pacing, arrhythmias, and cardiac cellular electrophysiology of the European Society of Cardiology. U.S. National Library of Medicine. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21518753/> (Accessed: January 31, 2023).