Management

Following a holistic assessment of the patient and the wound, it is essential that the level of moisture on the wound bed is optimised in order to encourage a moist wound environment. It is also important to ensure that the dressing selected for the management of a heavily exuding wound is fit for purpose. The attributes of an absorbent dressing relate to its ability to:

- Absorb and retain excess exudate, regardless of its consistency
- Prevent excoriation and maceration of the wound margins and surrounding skin
- Reduce the risk of infection by effectively managing moisture levels
- Promote a moist wound environment
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In order to achieve the objectives determined during assessment, it is necessary to assess the effectiveness of the absorbent dressing at each dressing change. This can be achieved by considering the factors in Box 1.

Box 1: Monitoring the effectiveness of an absorbent dressing for a particular wound

- Does the exudate appear to be absorbed and retained within the dressing?
- Have the patient’s wound margins remained dry and unbroken since the last dressing change?
- Has the exudate been absorbed and retained within the dressing?
- How saturated is the dressing? This measures its heaviness and the wear time
- Is there any leakage onto the peri-wound skin, such as excoriation/maceration?
- Can the dressing be removed straightforwardly?

Conclusion

It is crucial to have the knowledge and skills to undertake a comprehensive and robust patient and wound/exudate assessment, to understand the essential role of exudate in wound healing and to be able to identify differences in exudate volume, colour and viscosity. These skills and knowledge will help the clinician implement an evidence-based management plan and ensure appropriate dressing selection. This will help facilitate wound healing and, most importantly, improve the patient’s quality of life.

REFERENCES

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MANAGEMENT OF HIGH EXUDATE WOUNDS

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Your guide to the management of heavily exuding wounds

Joy Tickle
Tissue Viability Specialist, Storrington Community Hospital NHS Trust

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Impact of unmanaged wound exudate

Impact on the patient
- Exudate can lead to significant psychosocial challenges. Malodours for tissue repair can cause patients to become anxious, fearful and socially isolated.
- Exudate can also contribute to increased pain and discomfort.
- High exudate levels can necessitate more frequent dressing changes, further reducing quality of life (Mounds UK, 2013).

Impact on the clinician
- Increased dressing changes, which in turn require additional nurse time.
- Loss of use of resources, including wound dressings.
- Delayed wound healing, which again requires more resources (including dressings) and clinicians’ time.

Assessment of wound exudate

It is also important to treat the underlying wound pathology and any intrinsic factors that might increase exudate production. Activities associated with increased exudate are wound infection, edema or underlying medical conditions, such as heart failure, diabetes, or nephrotic syndrome. If not managed by a wound expert, the excessive wound exudate can result in maceration of the peri-wound skin and further tissue damage.

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Chronic wound exudate
- Contains elevated levels of MMPs. Lack of inhibition of the MMPs leads to the degradation of essential proteins, enzymes and growth factors. This results in impaired cell proliferation and further tissue breakdown.
- Can cause the wound to remain static in a state of prolonged inflammation, which delays healing (McCarty and Percival, 2013).
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