

# Unfolding Patients' Preferences in Wound Care

By Idevania Costa, RN NSWOC MN PhD

**P**atient preferences are usually indicated by the words and behaviours patients use to demonstrate their desire to have their voices heard and their needs met during their health-care journey. Patient preferences can be indicated by the choices individuals make when they are provided with options and information about their health and treatment.<sup>1</sup>

Although most patients and care partners want to have their voices heard and their concerns addressed, the wound care community has generally focused mostly on disease-centred symptoms and measuring quality of life.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup> These are important, but they do not necessarily incorporate patients' needs and wants. With growing acknowledgment of wound care as an important specialty and a public health concern that consumes significant resources, it is more important than ever that health-care providers (HCPs) shift their attention to the desires of the human being experiencing the burden of prolonged wound

management: patients should be given autonomy to make decisions and have their voices and needs honoured in their own care plan.

## Importance of Patient Autonomy and Preferences

According to Varkey, patient autonomy is one of the four ethical principles of bioethics: beneficence, nonmaleficence, autonomy and justice.<sup>6</sup> It refers to a patient's right to make decisions regarding their medical care without being coerced by others such as HCPs.<sup>7</sup> Patient autonomy allows HCPs to educate patients and care partners about treatment options, and the right to ask questions and participate in informed decision making. It does not allow HCPs to make decisions for their patients, which sometimes occurs when a care plan is designed without including them. Patient autonomy is also linked to patient preferences, and we should always be aware that patients have the right to choose what works well



for them and what fits well with their daily routine.

While providing patients with information about their treatment options is crucial, genuine patient-centred care necessitates a decision-making model that integrates ethical aspects.<sup>6</sup> In this model both patients and HCPs share their unique expertise and responsibility about the care they provide (from HCPs) and implement (by patients) with agreement on both sides. This paradigm will involve a change in health care whereby clinicians and patients collaborate to treat complex wounds and make decisions based on the patient's biological traits, preferences, values, beliefs and life circumstances, as well as the best scientific information available to support decision making.

The growing number of clinical circumstances associated with patients living with complex wounds presents various care/treatment options. Each comes with varying benefits and potential risks, and each comes face to face with the needs

and desires of individuals. These facts necessitate the development and implementation of a decision-making model that includes patients and care partners at the centre of decision making.<sup>7</sup>

### **Moving Toward a Model that Considers Patients at the Centre of Care**

Health-care organizations are constantly seeking methods that enhance their health-care delivery. As a holistic patient-centred approach to wound care gains attention and the need to have patients and families involved as partners grows, the shortage of wound care nurses and other health-care providers continues and financial pressures in the health-care sector build. Fortunately, when health-care organizations involve patients in their own care and decision-making there is potential to improve outcomes and relieve the pressure experienced in health-care systems due to staff shortages.<sup>8</sup>



The term *patient engagement* refers to a partnership between patients and clinicians that encourages patients to take responsibility for their own health and asks families and care partners to support patients during their health-care journey. Patients who are willing and prepared to engage and collaborate in the design and implementation of their own care plans have better health outcomes and express a higher level of satisfaction.<sup>9,10</sup>

## Patient-Centred Wound Care: Are we there yet?

The patient-centred care approach, which stresses communication, collaboration and health promotion while also respecting patients' expectations, autonomy and values, is at the heart of international health-care reform initiatives to enhance the delivery of safe, high-quality and cost-effective services.<sup>9,11</sup>

Patient-centred viewpoints necessitate a paradigm shift away from the paternalistic attitude that health-care workers are the only experts and should develop a care plan for, rather than with, patients at the centre. Patients who are well-informed and actively participate in their wound care become liberated and capable of participating in the design and implementation of their own care plan.<sup>11,12</sup>

As described above, evidence has shown that allowing patients to ask questions and

express their needs and concerns resonates with patient-centred wound care. However, this holistic approach to wound care will only be consolidated if clinicians allow it to happen by incorporating patients' voices, needs and concerns in their own care plan as well as approaching each patient as unique and experts in their life and own care. Each of us is responsible for taking action toward shifting the current approach and changing the future of wound care in Canada. 🇨🇦

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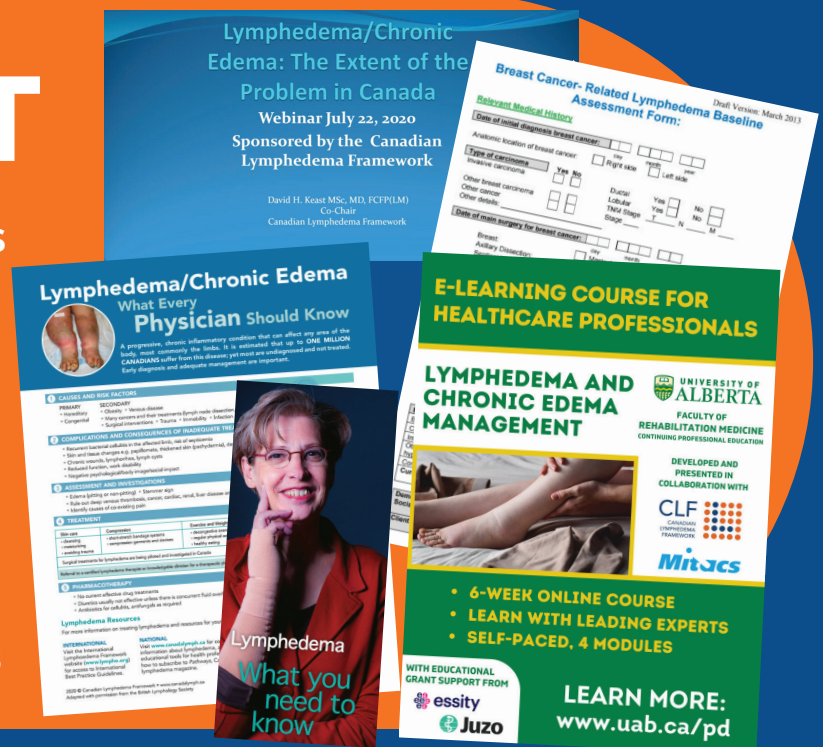


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