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## Special Advertising Section

### Don't ignore a troublesome wound; consult the experts

For many of us a cut or scrape is part of everyday living. But for those whose natural healing process is impacted by other health conditions, a simple sore can become a complex wound, leading to a chronic, painful condition.

"Chronic wounds are wounds where healing is stalled or delayed due to a patient's underlying health condition," says Mary Johnston-Bruno, Certified Wound Ostomy and Continence Nurse at RML Specialty Hospital. Patients are referred to RML's Chicago and Hinsdale locations from traditional hospitals, with needs requiring extended care, including wound care.

The most common type of chronic wound is caused by poor blood flow to or from the legs and feet. "These types of conditions are otherwise known as arterial and venous insufficiency," says Johnston-Bruno.

"Chronic wounds are seen most often in the elderly, especially those with arterial and vascular problems and pressure sores," says Dr. Fatima Jaffer of the Wound Care Center at Adventist La Grange Memorial Hospital. "But even Baby Boomers are afflicted with chronic wounds as multiple health problems mount -- including diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Even younger patients can suffer from chronic wounds from diabetes and venous stasis [slow blood flow in the veins]."

The chronically ill, elderly and those who are paralyzed are prone to a pressure ulcer or bedsore because they don't have the ability to reposition themselves. For diabetics, the types of wounds they might develop sometimes go unnoticed.

"Diabetics with uncontrolled blood sugars may lose their sensation and may develop an unnoticed wound infection on their foot when they step on a sharp object," says Johnston-Bruno.

According to Jaffer, at any given time, almost 6 million Americans suffer from chronic, non-healing

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wounds. "Of the 18.5 million Americans with diabetes, an estimated 1.8 million will suffer from a problem wound," she says.

### **Case in point**

Bunny O'Rourke, 68, of La Grange has been a diabetic since the age of 50. Her struggle with the disease led to gangrene and the amputation of her toes on her right foot.

"I also developed a large wound on the bottom of my foot one and a half years ago," says O'Rourke. "

O'Rourke was referred to Dr. Brian Rozanski of the Wound Care Center of La Grange Hospital. Rozanski has performed 12 skin grafts to close the wound and O'Rourke happily reports it is now the size of a quarter.

"It's not easy going through something like this," she says. "But at the center they make it as nice as possible. They treat you like a human being who needs care."

Rozanski has designed a special pair of shoes for her. The right shoe has padding on the heel where the wound is and forces the rest of her foot to bear the weight, so the wound can continue to heal. While she can't walk on the foot yet, she can transfer from bed to chair to car.

While the process -- which also includes medication, special pads and wrapping the wound -- has been arduous, O'Rourke says she is getting results.

### **Treatment**

As with O'Rourke, treating complex wounds is often a multipronged approach, beginning with the cause of the problem, as well as having medical practitioners who understand the disease processes that are responsible for the development of a chronic wound.

"Treatments include removing or treating the underlying cause of the wound," says Dr. Joseph Kent, infectious disease specialist with RML.

In addition, poor nutrition contributes to the formation of wounds and improving nutrition can promote healing. Removing pressure from the wound allows healing as well, says Kent.

Jaffer says the most effective treatments at the Wound Care Center include dressings impregnated with special healing products from collagen to silver to iodine to medical grade honey; wound debridement; vacuum-assisted negative pressure therapy (to help heal deeper wounds); bioengineered skin graft (a procedure that applies skin grafts made from human skin cells grown in the lab); compression wraps; and hyperbaric oxygen therapy -- daily treatment, up to 60 total, in a hyperbaric chamber to improve circulation to the wound site and promote healing.

### **Prevention, diligence**

Prevention of chronic wounds starts with regular visits to the primary care physician, says Jaffer. "Blood work should be analyzed on a regular basis and diabetes kept under control," she says. "Good nutrition is also a key preventative step as is proper management of leg swelling. Diabetic and elderly patients also should have regular podiatric exams."

To prevent a chronic wound one needs to understand how aging and certain health conditions impact skin and wound healing, says Johnston-Bruno.

Bottom line: All the medical experts agree it is important to not neglect a festering wound. Be diligent and pay attention to the "age of the wound."

"It would be reasonable to say a wound with proper treatment that did not show signs of healing in three to four weeks, is chronic," says Johnston-Bruno. "This patient should then seek appropriate medical care from a health provider certified to care for chronic wounds."

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