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Nationally Recognized Wound Care Program at Drake Center

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and Exceptional Outcomes

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By Leigh Wilkins, Senior Writer

For most people, wounds are mere inconveniences — here today and gone next week. But for many, they can become life-altering realities, causing pain, isolation, disability and even depression. For these individuals and others, there is the Advanced Wound Care Program at Drake Center.

Founded in 2005, the program provides comprehensive care for inpatients and outpatients experiencing nonhealing wounds that include ostomies; diabetic, venous and pressure ulcers; and traumatic

Physicians and nurses work together in all aspects of wound care at Drake Center. Certified wound care nurses are able to provide wound care and dressings. In addition, a clinical nurse specialist certified in ostomy care is available at the outpatient clinic three days a week.



PHOTO BY DANIEL DAVENPORT

wounds, among others. Today, more and more physicians in the region are referring increasingly complex wound cases to Drake Center, where medical personnel have the time, resources and expertise to provide comprehensive care.

The Advanced Wound Care Program at Drake Center is the only one of its kind in the country whose entire medical staff — including the physician and about 20 nurses — is wound care-certified and dedicated entirely to wound care. Team members use innovative,

evidence-based treatment protocols, allowing the program to achieve outcomes that surpass national benchmarks. These include the following:

- 90% of inpatients experience wound volume reduction of 50% or better in four weeks (a recent clinical study indicated that a 50% reduction in 12 weeks is a good indicator of healing);
- Complete healing for 55% of patients with complex surgical/trauma wounds; and
- 60% fewer hospital-acquired pressure ulcers than the national average.

ANSWERING THE CALL FOR MORE COMPREHENSIVE WOUND CARE

“Drake Center has always provided wound therapy, but it became obvious two years ago that our patients needed more intensive, coordinated care,” said Lu Ann Reed, M.S.N., C.R.R.N., R.N.C., W.C.C., and Clinical Manager of the Advanced Wound Care Program. “Many of these patients have already experienced extended hospital stays or surgical interventions that have resulted in nonhealing wounds. Others are severely ill, with compromised immune and circulatory systems that tend to prevent healing. And our many wheelchair or bedridden patients are

at risk for pressure ulcers. Medical advances are helping these patients live longer, but their quality of life can be seriously affected by chronic wounds.”

Under Reed’s leadership, the Advanced Wound Care Program has grown significantly. Her efforts were recognized last September, when the National Alliance of Wound Care (NAWC) honored her as its first-ever Outstanding Wound Care-Certified Nurse of the Year. At that time, Reed also received NAWC’s first-ever Outstanding Research in Wound Care Award. And just recently, Drake’s Advanced Wound Care Program was selected a finalist for the *Cincinnati Business Courier’s* Health Care Hero awards in the Innovator category.

Bryan Adkins, M.D., W.C.C., Medical Director, attributes much of the program’s success to the fact that it is a “total team effort from day one.” He explained that every patient admitted to Drake — even those without chronic wounds — is examined and photographed from head to toe by a wound care nurse. This enables the staff to create a personalized wound care treatment plan and identify the patient’s risk for pressure ulcers, allowing for a proactive rather than reactive approach. Each patient’s progress is documented on a Web-based system that stores data, and also provides resources such as national wound healing and nosocomial pressure ulcer rates.

The program’s comprehensive array of therapies includes hyperbaric oxygen (HBO) therapy, bioengineered skin substitutes, negative-pressure wound therapy and transcutaneous oxygen monitoring, among others. “Protocols are not universal when it comes to wound care, but because we see so many patients with so many different kinds of wounds, we know what will work best in individual cases,” Dr. Adkins explained.

HBO therapy is especially effective for complex wounds where blood or oxygen supply to the tissues is limited or infection is present, such as diabetic foot ulcers, osteomyelitis and radiation necrosis, Dr. Adkins said. He estimated that 95% of patients with qualifying conditions experience an extensive recovery.

HBO therapy is administered by placing patients in a chamber where they breathe 100% oxygen at higher-than-normal pressures. This process causes large amounts of oxygen to be dissolved into the blood and tissues (about 10-15 times the usual amount). The dissolved oxygen can penetrate areas of the body that red blood cells can’t reach,



A transcutaneous oxygen monitoring device measures the level of oxygen at a wound site, helping Drake Center’s wound care team determine the potential for wound healing with hyperbaric oxygen (HBO) treatment.

PHOTO BY DANIEL DAVENPORT

revitalizing tissues that receive poor blood flow. Drake Center currently has one HBO chamber, and is adding a second chamber this month that will accommodate patients weighing up to 700 pounds.

A DRAMATIC TURNAROUND

Retired Air Force Col. Helen Colley can attest to the effectiveness of HBO therapy and the care she received at Drake Center. Colley, 73, suffers from cutaneous scleroderma, an autoimmune condition in which the skin loses its vascular supply. One result is that even tiny abrasions can develop into open, draining wounds.

Colley underwent two skin graft surgeries for leg ulcers in 2004. In May 2007, John Kitzmiller, M.D., a plastic surgeon on staff at Drake Center, recommended skin graft surgery for a third ulcer. Colley remembered this as a real low point. “Before the surgery, my ulcer looked worse every time I changed the dressing,” she recalled.



An example of the Wound Care Program's exceptional outcomes: Fifty-one-year-old admitted from acute care hospital with MRSA cellulitis with a medical history of hypertension. Inpatient treatment included antibiotics, enzymatic debridement, sharp debridement, plastic surgery consult, surgery and negative-pressure wound therapy. Outpatient care included collagen dressings. The wound is now 100% healed.

"I was homebound because I had to keep my leg elevated at all times, even in the tub! Sometimes I was almost in tears because I hadn't seen improvement in such a long time."

Immediately following surgery, Colley was transferred from University Hospital to Drake Center, where she remained for eight weeks. During that time, she underwent rehabilitation and had 60 HBO treatments, as well as intravenous antibiotic therapy to address Dr. Kitzmiller's concern that a resistant bacteria was preventing her ulcer from healing. Since being discharged, Colley has returned to the Advanced Wound Care Program outpatient clinic for periodic follow-up care and is now symptom-free.

"Using these two therapies at once made all the difference, and the staff at Drake Center was absolutely wonderful, positive and supportive and very much in tune with what I was going through," Colley said. "They told me I would get better, and they were right."

LOOKING AT THE WHOLE PATIENT

Dramatic recoveries like Colley's are not unusual for Drake Center patients, said Mary Arnold Long, M.S.N., R.N., C.R.R.N., C.W.O.C.N., A.P.R.N.-B.C., Clinical Nurse Specialist, who helped build the Advanced Wound Care Program at Drake Center from the ground up. "One key for us is to take the patient's entire condition into consideration," she explained. "Chronic diseases such as diabetes and renal or heart failure are often involved, impacting the body's ability to heal. Sometimes the wound becomes the patient's focus because of how it looks or smells, because of self-care issues or because of disability, but we address the underlying problems as well as care for the wound itself."

While most Advanced Wound Care Program patients are older (the average age is 57), some are not. Holly Tylicki, 21, has been an inpatient at Drake Center since November 2007, after being critically injured in a car crash. Tylicki's extensive trauma wounds were mostly to her lower extremities, requiring many surgeries at University Hospital. Staff at Drake Center have employed a number of therapies

to promote healing, including negative-pressure wound therapy, which involves applying suction to the wound bed. This technique is thought to increase vascularity of the wound, promote fluid balance, reduce edema and provide other benefits.

"As a result of this therapy and others, Holly's most severe wound, which was at one time 100% open, is now 30% open," said Anne Blevins, B.S.N., R.N., W.C.C., Inpatient Clinical Coordinator and Holly's primary wound care nurse. "It's been a long road, but we are expecting Holly to walk again and live a normal life."

Brenda Shortridge, Tylicki's mother, shared Blevins' optimism and credited Drake for her daughter's recovery. "Drake Center has made it possible for us to be where we are today," she said. "Things are looking really good now, and we attribute that to the innovative treatment and personal care that Holly's received. The nurses and the rest of the staff are just wonderful."

I welcome referrals, and I'm also happy to discuss cases with physicians by phone.

— Bryan Adkins, M.D., W.C.C., Medical Director

REFERRING YOUR PATIENTS

Tylicki's injuries were so severe that there was never any question she needed intensive wound therapy. This is not always the case, said Dr. Adkins. "It can come down to a judgment call for physicians whose patients present with diabetic foot ulcers, postsurgical complications or other wounds," he explained. "I welcome referrals, and I'm also happy to discuss cases with physicians by phone. The program accepts self-referrals for outpatient care as well, which is a helpful feature for some patients."

To learn more or refer a patient to the Advanced Wound Care Program at Drake Center, please call (513) 418-2707. For more information about the program or about Drake Center, visit www.DrakeCenter.com. ■