

Wound Healing Association of Southern Africa National Conference 2019

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Introduction

The Wound Healing Association of Southern Africa's annual national conference was held on 30–31 August 2019 at Birchwood Hotel and Conference Centre, Johannesburg. The two-day conference was themed: *The future of wound care in South Africa – together we can* and reflected the multidisciplinary and intersectoral collaborations for improving the outcomes of patients with non-healable and maintenance wounds. The conference was attended by 120 delegates from various disciplines (wound care practitioners, vascular and plastic surgeons, palliative care nurses, nurses working in the geriatric care settings, general nurses from private and public hospitals, physiotherapists, podiatrists and more) from across South Africa. We have been honoured with the presence of three international speakers – Hiske Smart from the Kingdom of Bahrain, Madeleine Flanagan (Coupland) from the United Kingdom and Christina Atuhairwe from Uganda.

The management of wounds that are hard to heal or those that cannot heal (non-healable) are often challenging. WHASA lived up to its aim for advancing knowledge and research to optimise the management of wounds during this conference through plenary, workshop and abstract presentations. Delegates had an opportunity to network, benchmark and visit the trade exhibitions.

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Keynote address

Hiske Smart, an advanced wound care specialist currently managing the Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy for Wound Healing unit at the King Hamad University Hospital, delivered a motivational keynote address. She defined the concept of non-healable and maintenance wounds and gave an overview of the burden of maintenance and non-healable wounds in their practice. Her words “your time is now!” encouraged the audience to value and share their work and research with the world.

Plenary sessions

The following speakers delivered plenaries: Prof. Magda Mulder (Head of the School of Nursing, University of The Free State), Dr Gregory Weir (vascular surgeon), Madeleine Flanagan (Coupland) (principal lecturer in skin integrity and dermatology at the School of Life and Medical Sciences, University of Herfordshire), Dr Christina Atuhairwe (medical officer of the Burns Care and Plastic Surgery

Unit in Mulago), Dr Maria Giaquinto-Cilliers (plastic surgeon), Valana Skinner (advanced wound care practitioner), Zhavandre van der Merwe (advanced wound care practitioner), Dr Sasje Venter (medical doctor, palliative care specialist), Annette Reed (Manager of Centurion Hospice), Fahmida Mohamed (physiotherapist), Liz Wilson Chandler (advanced wound care practitioner), Susan Thiert (advanced wound care practitioner) and Retha van Zyl (specialist in POPI and PAIA compliance).

Key messages included the approaches to the management of non-healable and maintenance wounds and emphasised that debridement should be considered with caution and surgical debridement only performed after revascularisation. Treatment is, however, unique to the wound aetiology. Treating the cause is not an isolated part of the management but should rather be extended to identify the cause of the wound and determine healability and treat the symptoms and the complications. A presentation illustrated and explained Skin-changes at Life's End (SCALE) ulcers – a unique type of non-healable wound which should not be confused with a pressure injury.

A common thread throughout the presentations was the need for a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to optimally manage a patient with a non-healable or maintenance wound. The audience received facts and insights from various specialists, e.g. nutritional support, pain management and emotional support. The psychological aspects were also addressed – an advanced wound care practitioner reflected on the case of a patient's experiences of living with a fungating wound. A key message: "there is always hope".

A fundraiser was held for Centurion Hospice during the conference. The Centurion Hospice manager addressed the audience and explained the role of hospice. Practitioners were encouraged to reach out to Hospice and not be afraid to refer patients early for palliative care. Hospice nurses are palliative care specialists and their role to create an environment for optimal quality of life of the dying person and their families should not be underestimated.

Another common thread throughout the conference was an emphasis on the need for more research in wound care in South Africa. Three excellent research oral presentations were delivered and several research posters were showcased. Madeleine Flanagan provided the

audience with a magnificent presentation on evidence-based care, level of evidence and research methodologies.



Madeleine Flanagan's presentation on wound infection and biofilm management was one of the highlights of the conference.

The need for training in wound care was again emphasised throughout the conference and Prof. Magda Mulder gave the audience a perspective on current developments and challenges in the nursing profession in South Africa – it affects us all. A glimpse was given into the context of health care and wound care in the context of Uganda as well as other parts of the world where resource restriction is a challenge that can be overcome in part with innovation.

Workshops

The audience were also equipped with practical skills and tips on good record keeping. Practical workshops on stoma care, arterial-brachial-pressure-index measurement, 60 sec foot screen and infrared thermometry were facilitated by Henta Wells, Rene Lessing, Jane Hoole, Emanuelle Azor and Megan Madox.

In conclusion

The 2019 national WHASA conference was unique with a focus on a topic often neglected – the management of maintenance- and non-healable wounds. Plenary presentations supplemented each other and we hope practitioners were provided with more insight into evidence-based, multidisciplinary and holistic approaches to optimal wound care of patients who are often cared for in resource-restricted contexts. Practical workshops developed skills and the fun-filled funky hat event and 'Game of Dressings' balanced the weekend with some fun.