We are ready to sock it to ‘em! The ‘STOPCUTS’ pilot study. It is possible to do a full trial of protective socks for skin tears.

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Protective experiences of using the socks and/or taking part in the study

Two skin tears (lacerations) on the shin of an 80-year-old woman, sustained after she fell down the stairs. The skin edges no longer quite meet.

What’s the problem?

- For the over-70s, the skin on the arms and legs becomes thinner and more fragile.
- Skin can also get thin when certain medical conditions need courses of treatment with oral steroids and/or ‘blood thinning’ drugs such as warfarin. Diabetics are also at risk.
- Fragile skin is easily injured and can tear, even after a minor knock or scrape against common household or garden items.
- Skin tear injuries are common and can be very painful and confidence-sapping.
- They are prone to infection, take a long time to heal and are expensive for the NHS to treat.

Methods

- Participants were randomised to either wear Dermatuff® protective socks on a daily basis or their usual clothing for 16 weeks (=112 days).
- Working closely with care home staff, research nurses photographed, measured and classified the severity of all skin tear injuries. These were followed up until healed.
- Participants in both groups completed quality of life questionnaires at baseline, 16 weeks and in the event of a skin tear injury.
- Experiences of using the socks and/or taking part in the pilot trial were captured through semi-structured interviews and daily diaries.

Focus groups were held for care home managers and health professionals involved in the study.

Results

We achieved full recruitment and follow-up of 90 participants within the allotted time and budget. (July 2013 to Jan 2015) (figure 2). Recruiting from GP practices and the community from Feb 2014 helped us to catch up!

- Median age of participants was 85 years.
- Of the 44 participants in the socks group, 27(61.4%) wore the socks for the full 112 days. 11 (25%) discontinued them after a while and another 6 withdrew mostly due to poor health or lost capacity.
- In the control group 41/46 (89.1%) completed the trial and 5 withdrew.
- There were 12 adverse events which had a causal relationship to the socks: 8 were mild (mostly lower leg discomfort) and 4 were moderate (e.g. blisters, itching, pain in shoulder from putting them on). All recovered.
- There were 10 Serious Adverse Events (SAE’s) but these were either unlikely to be related or were not related to the protective socks.
- 79/90 (88%) of the expected 16 week questionnaires and 482/704 (68.5%) of the weekly diaries were received. 680 comments were recorded in total.
- 31 skin tear injuries occurred in 18 (20%) of the 90 participants over a period of 112 days. Further results are pending publication.

Conclusions

We have shown that it is possible to conduct a trial of the effectiveness of Dermatuff® protective socks to prevent lower leg skin tears among older people and those at risk – whether living in care homes or in the community.

Reference


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