DIABETIC FOOT AWARENESS POSTER. PROMOTING THE NEED FOR FOOT SCREENING AND PATIENT EDUCATION FOR PREVENTION OF COMPLICATIONS.

The Podiatry Department is embarking on a national diabetes and high-risk foot pathway for foot complications and morbidity in the Maltese population. Part of the campaign is to increase awareness among people with Diabetes about the need to undergo yearly foot screening and be exposed to education about footcare practices. This is key in reducing the incidence of lower limb amputations and foot ulcers. The practice of screening these patients has been available for many years now, however, recent audits and clinical practice has brought to light the fact that there are still patients who are not aware of this need or have, worryingly, never been referred for screening and education.

All podiatrists are trained to carry out this screening which includes the assessment and diagnosis of peripheral vascular disease, neuropathy and biomechanical abnormalities, which are the three main factors leading to foot ulceration. The presence of one or a combination of these factors has been proven to increase risk of foot ulcers and ultimately loss of part or all of the lower limb/s. Once ulceration develops, prognosis is very poor with a 1-year mortality rate of 25% (Anand et al., 2018) which increases to 45% in those who undergo major amputation (Kristensen et al., 2012). Furthermore, in terms of the ischemic lower limb, unless revascularisation is established, the development of critical limb ischaemia and ulceration is associated with poor prognosis, with a 200-fold increased risk of amputation and a 3-fold increased risk of mortality, highlighting that early diagnosis through screening is paramount (Anand et al., 2018).

After screening, patients are categorized in a level of risk, from low to high, for developing foot ulcers. They are given preventive footcare education and followed up accordingly for podiatry care. If need be, they are also referred for further specialist intervention including offloading devices (when increased pressure points are detected) and advice or interventions to improve perfusion where this is deemed necessary.

The Podiatry Department is also planning to improve on resources for delivering Diabetic foot education in such a way as to target patients and their carers on preventive practices, while also formulating a pathway for outreach when complications especially ulcers are already present. The poster supplied with this correspondence is an initial move to encourage patients and make them aware of the need for screening. We propose and encourage that it is printed and put up in spaces, such as waiting rooms, where people with Diabetes or relatives/carers can view it.

We are grateful for your co-operation in our endeavour to reduce the burden of Diabetic foot complications on patients' lives and on society.

Regards

The High Risk Foot Project team. Podiatry Department.