# "Stomp Out Heel Ulcers": A Pressure Ulcer Prevention Initiative in a Community Based Hospital

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## **Purpose**

To evaluate the effectiveness of a multifaceted pressure ulcer prevention initiative focused on the heels of hospitalized adult in-patients.

Background: Halton Healthcare Services (HHS) is a tri-site community based acute care organization providing health care to the communities of Oakville, Milton and Georgetown in Ontario, Canada. Pressure ulcer prevention is a key patient safety focus at HHS with participation in annual pressure ulcer prevalence surveys demonstrating a steady decline since 2009. Our 2010 pressure ulcer prevalence results indicated that pressure ulcers located on the heels were the most common anatomical location representing 35 ulcers or 42% of all ulcers identified. These results are significantly higher than those published by Vangilder, et al6 when reviewing nine international pressure ulcer prevalence surveys. They found heel ulcers to account for 23.7% of ulcers in the acute care setting.

# Method

The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario Pressure Ulcer Prevention Best Practice Guidelines5 identifies that an effective pressure ulcer prevention program requires a multifaceted approach. This includes early skin and risk assessments, pressure management, documentation and patient and family involvement. The HHS pressure ulcer prevention initiative, Stomp Out Heel Ulcers using this framework, included an algorithm to assess patient risk for developing a heel ulcer, methods to remove heel pressure, documentation of new facility acquired pressure ulcers and educational material directed to inform and educate patients, their families and the community.

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- 4. Langemo D, Thompson P, Hunter S, Anderson J. Heel pressure ulcers: stand guard. Advances in Skin and Wound care. 2008.21.282-92
- 5. Registered Nurses Association of Ontario. Risk assessement & prevention of pressure ulcers. available at: http://www.rnao. org/Storage/12/638\_BPG\_Pressure\_Ulcers\_v2.pdf 6. Vangilder C, Macfarlane GD, Meyer S. Results of nine international pressure ulcer prevalence surveys: 1989-2005. Ostomy

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# **The Initiative**

#### Heel Ulcer Prevention Algorithm.

This algorithm was created to assist nursing staff to quickly identify patients at risk for pressure related skin injury on the heel. It is not inclusive of all risk factors found in the literature. Simple pressure offloading options were also presented by floating with pillows or the use of a heel offloading device.



#### Introduction of a New Heel Protecting Boot.

The Posey Pro-HeelX<sup>®</sup> heel protector was chosen to be the heel protective device for this initiative as it fulfills the International Guideline for Prevention of Pressure Ulcers recommendations<sup>2</sup>. These guidelines state that "heel protection devices should elevate the heel completely (offload them) in such a way without putting pressure on the Achilles tendon". This new device ensures offloading is maintained even when patients move their legs.





#### **Patient and Family Education**

A patient and family education sheet titled Working Together to Prevent Pressure Ulcers was created to provide basic pressure ulcer facts and to inform patients and families how they can actively participate in the prevention plan. These sheets were placed in high traffic areas such as near elevators as well as in the pre-operative packages of all patients undergoing elective surgical procedures. The organization took one step further by partnering with the local television station to produce a short community segment titled HHS Bedsores no more. This segment was used to heighten awareness of pressure ulcer risk and the prevention strategies in place at HHS.



### Working Together to **Prevent Pressure Ulcers**





This info sheet has been developed to answer commonly asked questions by patients and families regarding pressure ulcers and the preventative actions that both patients and families can take to prevent pressure ulcers.

#### **New Incident Reporting**

A new pressure ulcer section was built into our electronic incident reporting system. The aim of this reporting was to accomplish two tasks. First to gather real time information regarding the incidence of facility acquired pressure ulcers across the organization and second to reinforce the fact that any pressure related skin breakdown is an undesired and unexpected incident.

## **Results**

This initiative was launched in January 2011. Our annual pressure ulcer prevalence survey was conducted as a part of the Hill-Rom International Pressure Ulcer Prevalence Survey in February 2011. The number of heel pressure ulcers across our organization dropped from 35 ulcer or 42% of all ulcers to 17 ulcers accounting for 29%. An HHS prevalence conducted nine months later in October 2011 demonstrated that these improvement have been sustained. Heels are no longer the most common anatomical location for pressures ulcer.

