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"The Long Road to Limb Loss: Frequency, Duration, and Cost of Pre-Amputation Wound Care"

Background: Nontraumatic lower-limb amputations are a major health issue, often linked to chronic conditions like diabetes and peripheral artery disease and are preceded by prolonged, costly wound care. Although pre-amputation wound care is expensive and resource-intensive, utilization patterns—particularly duration and visit frequency—are not well characterized. This study aims to characterize the cost, duration, and frequency of wound care utilized before lower limb amputation, hypothesizing extended treatment courses with high associated expenditures.

Methods: A retrospective cohort of adult patients who underwent major lower-extremity amputations for a nontraumatic etiology between 2014 and 2024 at University Medical Center was identified using Epic SlicerDicer. Patient charts were abstracted using REDCap (a HIPAA-compliant database), and data were collected on wound care encounters, treatment duration, cost estimates, and wound outcome (amputation).

Results: In a preliminary analysis of thiry-three patient records, the average age at the time of amputation was 50 years (range 24-65) and 82% were male. 70% of our cohort was African American race. 61% of subjects experienced limb loss attributed to medical conditions such as diabetes and vascular insufficiency. For 26 subjects with wound care information available, the average wound care episodes per week was 3.6 visits per week for an average of 10.6 weeks. 58% of subjects required operative wound care. Cost estimates are pending.

Discussion: Patients with chronic wounds frequently face prolonged, costly wound care before amputation, and better characterization of utilization patterns—cost, duration, and visit frequency—will support subgroup analyses and identification of high-cost predictors, guiding earlier interventions and optimizing resource allocation. Our preliminary data highlight that wound care associated with chronic medical conditions involves frequent wound care visits for several weeks but limb loss still occurs despite a prolonged course of attempted wound treatment.