

The importance of wound and tissue healing research

Associate Professor Michael Woodward AM
Chair, Research Portfolio
Wounds Australia

- Research is a core function of health and social care¹.
- It is essential for our health and well-being and for the care we receive. Research should improve the evidence base, reduce uncertainties and lead to improvements in care.
- Evidence suggests the quality of current care may be higher in organisations that take part in research, adopt a learning culture and implement research findings.
- Improved care can give people a better quality of life and the country benefits from more money and jobs if the environment for research attracts international research funders to invest and carry out their research here.

1. UK policy framework for health and social care research, 2017

- Research develops the skills of staff in our universities, businesses and health and social care.
- It also involves patients, service users and the public in the pursuit of knowledge that may benefit them and others, not only by their participation in research but also by their involvement in setting research priorities, in the design, management, conduct and dissemination of research, in public engagement about research, as members of research approval bodies such as research ethics committees or in funding research through taxes and charitable donations.

- Research is the attempt to derive generalisable or transferable new knowledge to answer or refine relevant questions with scientifically sound methods.
- This excludes audits of practice and service evaluations. It includes activities that are carried out in preparation for or as a consequence of the interventional part of the research, such as screening potential participants for eligibility, obtaining participants' consent and publishing results.
- It also includes non-interventional health and social care research (i.e. projects that do not involve any change in standard treatment, care or other services), projects that aim to generate hypotheses, methodological research and descriptive research.
- Projects whose primary purpose is educational to the researcher, either in obtaining an educational qualification or in otherwise acquiring research skills, but which also fall into the definition of research, are best also defined as research.

How does this apply to wound research?

- In the absence of a defined wound management specialty, many health providers engage in clinical practice
- Indeed, this is one field where the general public also can feel quite competent
 - This leads to a wide range of styles, competencies, outcomes etc.
- Industry is a major driver of practice
 - “see these before and after pictures- this product must work”
 - but industry can and does also support excellent research
- Research competencies and resources also vary widely
- Poor understanding of the gaps
 - ie what needs to be researched
- Tendency to rationalize
 - “wounds are different”
 - “we have already carried out enough research in this area”
 - “we will never get the support that other clinical areas receive”

The imperative

- If we do not more fully adopt a research culture
 - Our understanding of tissue healing will remain very incomplete
 - Outcomes will continue to vary widely
 - Resources/funding will remain scarce
 - The specialty will remain ill-defined
 - Government/other regulators will not subsidize products/technologies
- There HAS been a shift to such a culture
 - And not every clinician is attracted strongly to research
- BUT we still have a long way to go

Medical Research Future Fund

- Endowment Fund (\$20b) with capital preserved in perpetuity
 - \$1.65b to be allocated in 2017-18
- Recognizes the economic opportunities of health
 - 7% of the economy
 - 14% of the workforce
 - 20% of Commonwealth expenditure
- Current priorities relevant to us include
 - Antimicrobial resistance
 - International collaborative research
 - Building evidence in primary care
 - Clinical quality registries
 - Clinical trials networks
 - Targeted translational topics
 - Public good demonstration trials

Research- why do it?

- Wrong question!
- Research- why we must do it
- And why we must do it well
- AND apply the outcomes
 - Translational research
 - And demonstrate the impact on outcomes
- Then take these results to funders/governments
 - Will provide more resources for research
 - Which in turn builds research capacity
 - Including competent researchers
 - And will be far more inclined to subsidize/provide products/technologies
 - With a proven benefit on outcomes and costs

The Challenge

- Become aware of research already being conducted in your field
- Be aware of research resources in your service/area
 - Seek a mentor experienced in research
- Consider developing your research skills
 - Formally or informally
 - Only a minority will become career researchers, but all can have this as a part of their role/passion/scope
- Develop relevant hypotheses and see if you can test them
- ALWAYS share your results

What is the Wounds Australia Research Portfolio doing?

- Bringing together clinicians and non-clinicians passionate about research
 - And sharing this passion/focus at sessions like this one
- Identifying research gaps
- Directly supporting research projects
 - \$20,000 this cycle
- Advocating for more research funding and resources
 - Both through our grants and more generally
- Working with other bodies, within and outside Wounds Australia, to integrate research into our landscape
 - This will also enable the specialty of wound management to more fully emerge
 - As well as improving outcomes for our patients/clients
- Submission to MRFF