International Skin Tear Advisory Panel: Evidence Based Prediction, Prevention, Assessment, and Management of Skin Tears

Kimberly LeBlanc MN RN CETN(C) IWCC, Sharon Baranoski MSN RN CWCN APN-CCNS FAAN, Dawn Christensen MHSc RN CETN(C) IWCC, Karen Edwards MSS BN RN CWOCN. Mary Gloeckner MS RN COCN CWOCN. Samantha Holloway RN Msc, Diane Langemo PhD RN FAAN. Mary Regan PhD RN CNS CWCN, Mary Ann Sammon BN CWCN, R. Gary Sibbald BSc MD FRCP(Med)(Derm) MED MAPWCA, Ann Williams BN RCNW CWOCN

Until recently skin tears were an under appreciated wound with very little attention or research directed towards this particular wound etiology. The International Skin Tear Advisory Panel defines skin tears as "a wound caused by shearing, friction, and/or blunt force resulting in separation of skin layers. A skin tear can be partial-thickness (separation of the epidermis from the dermis) or full-thickness (separation of both the epidermis and dermis from underlying structures)". 1

Skin Tears are unique in that they are common acute wounds in the elderly. However, the neonate and pediatric population are also at risk for skin tears. Skin tears are frequently under-reported. Skin tears have been reported in the literature to have prevalence rates equal to or greater than those of pressure ulcers. 2 The role of identifying skin tears with a comprehensive skin assessment needs further study.

Individuals suffering from skin tears complain of increased pain and decreased quality of life. Populations at the highest risk for skin tears include those at extremes of age and the critically or chronically ill. These individuals are at a higher risk for developing secondary wound infections and have co-morbidities.

Health-care professionals must be cognizant of which individuals are at risk for developing skin tears, how to prevent these wounds, and how to treat them once they occur. In recent literature there has been increasing attention given to skin tears, but there has been no gold standard developed for their management. While the prevention of skin tears is the primary focus, health-care professionals must be equipped to manage these wounds when they do occur. By recognizing which patients are at risk for skin tears, preventing skin injuries, and using appropriate non-adherent dressings we can save patients undue pain and suffering.

In order to diminish the impact of skin tears on our health care systems it is imperative that a systematic prevention program be implemented. The International Skin Tear Advisory Panel has created a tool kit for the prevention, identification, and treatment of skin tears. Each component of the tool kit has been developed to complement other components. The tool kit is based on extensive literature reviews, international input from healthcare professionals, and an expert opinion. It has undergone an extensive peer review process in the form of a modified Delphi process.

The tool kit was designed to include components that would serve as a basis for education and implementation guidance for prevention and treatment programs. It includes the following:

• Skin Tear Risk assessment Pathway (Figure 1)
• Prevalence Study Data Collection Sheet (Figure 2)
• Pathway to Assessment/Treatment of Skin Tears (Figure 3)
• Skin Tear Decision Algorithm (Figure 4)
• Drugs Associated with Risk of Falls (Table 1)
• Quick Reference Guide for the ISTAP Risk Reduction Program (Table 2)
• Skin Tear Product Selection Guide (Table 3)

Goals and Objective

The goal of the ISTAP Skin Tear Tool Kit is to provide a foundation to assist and guide individuals, their circle of care, and health care professionals in the risk assessment, prevention and treatment of skin tears. The ISTAP Skin Tear Tool Kit is designed to allow the clinician to implement systematic approach to the prevention, management and treatment of skin tears.

Methodology

The ISTAP group developed the tool kit and subsequently subjected it to a global review and input from a wide group of international reviewers. The purpose of this review was to disseminate the globally agreed ISTAP Skin Tear Tool Kit and to generate further research on this topic. A three-phase modified-Delphi method was used to reach consensus on the components of the ISTAP Skin Tear Tool Kit.

Summary

This toolkit for health care professionals provides ways to implement effective skin tear prevention, assessment, and treatment practices through an interprofessional approach to care. The document includes an implementation guide with tools and resources. The tools and resources are designed to be used in multiple healthcare settings and by all levels of staff and caregivers.

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References