

Beyond the Dressing: A Therapist Assistant's Journey Through the Evolution of Wound Care

(By Folasade Olatunji)

Last week, after watching Esther - Co-Founder of Healthcare Professionals Matter Too's YouTube video about her intention to attend the International Conference: *From Skin to Scar Care*, in Aberdeen/Scotland, I found myself reflecting on my own journey in healthcare. It prompted me to think about how much wound care has changed during my own career and, perhaps more importantly, how much I have had to change and adapt alongside it.



I have worked as a Therapist Assistant for the past ten years. When I first started, much of our approach to wound care was based on traditional methods, established routines and the knowledge that had been passed down through

practice. There was a certain familiarity in doing things the way they had always been done. Over time, however, healthcare practice in the UK, including within the Health and Social Care (HSC), has continued to develop. Wound care is no longer simply about cleaning a wound, applying a dressing and monitoring its appearance.

It has become a more complex area of care that requires knowledge, assessment, critical thinking, appropriate product selection, documentation, communication and, above all, a person-centred approach. This evolution has been both exciting and challenging.

Keeping pace with change

One of the biggest challenges I have experienced as a Therapist Assistant is keeping pace with the speed at which clinical practice evolves. There have been times when I have arrived at work and discovered that a new dressing or wound-care product has been introduced. Suddenly, something that was unfamiliar has become part of everyday practice. Perhaps there is an online training session to complete, or a face-to-face session arranged to explain the new product or procedure. Sometimes the learning is straightforward. At other times, it takes additional reading, questions and practical experience before I feel confident using something new.

This is the reality of working in modern healthcare: learning does not stop when we qualify or when we become experienced. If anything, experience reminds us how important it is to remain open to learning. The developments in wound care have meant that I have had to attend various training sessions to update my knowledge and understanding. These opportunities have helped me appreciate

that good wound care is not about simply knowing the names of different dressings. It is about understanding why a particular approach may be appropriate for a particular patient and recognising when a situation requires further assessment or escalation.

The impact of technology

Technology has also changed the way we learn and practise. Online learning has made education more accessible, allowing healthcare professionals and support staff to complete training without always having to leave the workplace. At the same time, the rapid advancement of technology can sometimes feel overwhelming.

There is always something new to learn: a new digital system, a new piece of equipment, a new online resource, a new product or a new way of documenting and sharing information.

For someone who began their career in a more traditional environment, adapting to these developments can sometimes be challenging. However, I have learned that feeling challenged does not necessarily mean that we are falling behind. Sometimes it simply means that we are learning something new. The important thing is to remain curious and willing to ask questions.

Learning from those around us

One of the things I appreciate most in my workplace is the support available from senior colleagues and leaders. There have been occasions when I have needed further clarification about a new practice, product or procedure. Rather

than feeling that I should already know everything, I have learned the importance of asking questions. I am fortunate to work alongside senior leaders who are willing to support junior members of staff and provide further clarification when needed. That support is invaluable.

Healthcare is a team effort. No one person can know everything, particularly in an environment where evidence, technology, products and clinical practices are continually developing. Creating a culture where people feel comfortable asking questions is therefore essential for professional development, and ultimately for patient safety and quality of care. For me, seeking clarification is not a sign of weakness. It is part of being a responsible healthcare professional.

Beyond the dressing

Perhaps the biggest lesson I have learned throughout my journey is that wound care is about much more than the dressing. It is easy to focus on the physical wound. We see the skin, the tissue, the exudate, the dressing and the treatment plan. But behind every wound is a person.

That person may be experiencing pain, anxiety, reduced mobility, embarrassment, frustration or fear. A wound can affect sleep, independence, confidence and quality of life. It can also place significant demands on families and carers. This is why I believe the title *Beyond the Dressing* is so important.

Our role is not simply to complete a task. It is to care for the individual experiencing the wound. A good healthcare professional needs to look beyond what is immediately visible. How is the patient feeling? Are they comfortable? Do they understand what is happening? Are they able to participate in their

care? Are there concerns that need to be communicated to other members of the multidisciplinary team? These questions remind me that wound care is only one part of a much bigger picture.

Ten years on: still learning

Looking back at my ten years as a Therapist Assistant, I realise that my experience has not been a journey from knowing very little to knowing everything. Instead, it has been a journey of continuous learning. There have been moments when I have felt confident because of my experience, and other moments when new developments have reminded me that there is still much more to learn.

I have had to attend training. I have had to adapt to new products and procedures. I have had to become more comfortable with technology. I have had to ask questions. And I have had to accept that keeping up with change is part of working in healthcare.

Most importantly, I have learned that professional development is not just about collecting certificates or completing mandatory training. It is about taking what we learn and allowing it to improve the care we provide.

Looking ahead

Esther's discussion about attending the *From Skin to Scar Care* conference made me reflect on the importance of opportunities like this. Conferences, training sessions, discussions with colleagues and access to new evidence all provide opportunities to broaden our knowledge and challenge our existing ways of

thinking. For me, the goal is not to become an expert overnight. It is to remain willing to learn, to recognise the areas where I need to develop and to use the support around me.

The evolution of wound care will undoubtedly continue. New technologies, products, research and approaches will emerge. As healthcare professionals and support staff, we will need to continue evolving with them. After ten years, I can say that I still love my work. And perhaps that is the most important part of my journey.

I love it not simply because of wound care, but because of **patient care**. Every wound belongs to a person, and every person deserves to be treated with dignity, compassion and respect. The dressing may be part of the treatment, but it is never the whole story.

My journey has taught me that being a Therapist Assistant is about much more than completing clinical tasks. It is about learning, adapting, communicating, supporting colleagues and putting the patient at the centre of everything we do. **Wound care may continue to evolve—but so must we. And beyond every dressing, there is a person who needs our care.**