

Wound Care Kit Project

Overview and Summary of Results

April 2024

Introduction

Public Health – Seattle & King County’s (PHSKC) Mobile Vans and Street Medicine teams began distributing wound care kits in August 2023 along with handouts that provide instructions on how to care for wounds and information about other available resources. The primary goal of distributing wound care kits is to enhance patients wound care practices, with additional goals of learning more about wound care needs and sharing with community providers.

Approach

PHSKC Community Health Services Data Team has supported efforts to gather feedback from community members with lived expertise through conducting **focus groups** at different community provider locations across King County including North Seattle, Downtown Seattle, South Seattle, and South King County.

Focus groups helped to deepen our understanding of current wound care practices, challenges in accessing support for wound care, and feedback on the supplies included in the wound care kits.

These focus groups were conducted in partnership with [VOCAL-WA](#). VOCAL-WA is a grassroots membership organization building power among no and low-income people who are affected by war on drugs, substance use, homelessness, HIV/AIDS, mass incarceration, and other forms of systemic violence. This project would not have been possible without VOCAL-WA’s leadership, support, and facilitation skills. Thank you!

Additionally, we would like to thank Aileen’s, Recovery Café, People’s Harm Reduction Alliance, and DESC for hosting focus groups.

The Data Team also facilitated **focused conversations** with Mobile and Street Medicine Nurses to capture primary feedback from providers and secondary feedback from patients in close to real time in the least burdensome way possible.

Results

Approximately **480 kits** have been distributed between August 2023 and March 2024. Community partners graciously hosted and supported the facilitation of **four focus groups** reaching **39 community members**. We also facilitated **two focused conversations** with Mobile and Street Med Nurses. Through qualitative analysis, the following themes have emerged:

“Usually when I get hurt I’ll wait until it’s so bad I end up in the ER. Save everybody a lot more money if these [wound care kits] were more available. It would be a lot cheaper and a lot better solution for everybody.”
-Community Member

1) Wound care kits are fulfilling an unmet need.

There has been unanimous and enthusiastic agreement across community members, community partners, and Mobile/Street Med providers that wound care kits play a valuable role in addressing the health care needs of unsheltered folks in our community. The wound care kits have been described by community members as “great,” “amazing,” and “really nice.”

*“It’s hard to keep wounds clean. Feel disgusting, hopeless, overwhelming. Hard to find supplies and they’re expensive.”
-Community Member*

*“COVID made it harder. There’s no restrooms. People who have medical conditions... when they closed the restrooms down - what are we supposed to do? We still have to go to the bathroom too.”
-Community Member*

2) Wound care kits are a successful approach to reducing barriers to care.

When asked about challenges caring for wounds, the most common response was keeping wounds clean without **access to clean water and bathrooms**. Community members report hygiene services are important but can be difficult to access depending on when they’re open.

Access to supplies is another commonly reported barrier, some report resorting to stealing from drug stores because the cost of supplies is prohibitive.

Community members report doing as much as possible to care for wounds themselves or with the help of peers rather than risk **experiencing stigma or poor treatment by providers** in clinic or hospital settings.

*“I’ve helped take care of quite a few peoples wounds.”
-Community Member*

Several community members mentioned they will only go to the emergency department if “it gets really bad,” with signs of infection or severe pain. Community members are more likely to seek support from Needle Exchange, outreach workers, shelter nurses, or mobile/street med teams.

*“They treat the homeless differently too. You get treated differently at hospitals. You go in there with a wound... Doctors don’t want to deal with you. It’s too bad. That’s why a lot of us are reluctant to go. It ends up costing the taxpayers a lot more money by having the right stuff.”
- Community Member*

3) Wound care kits support increased engagement.

Community partners and Mobile/Street Med Nurses have both reported that wound care kits and educational handouts have provided many pathways to engagement. This has included opportunities to have conversations with folks who aren’t interested in services and want to manage wounds on their own or have friends with wound care needs. Sharing what is in the kit allows for good conversation.

"I think your guide played a key role in [the patient] being able to access treatment, follow guidelines that met his literacy needs and feel empowered to provide the care to himself, and heal the wounds themselves."

-Community Provider

A Mobile Van Nurse reported they observed someone sitting outside cleaning a wound with alcohol and after offering a wound care kit and chatting they agreed to services on the van. Nurses report at least several patients who have returned for a second kit with positive feedback, especially in south county.

One community provider shared a story about how the educational handout helped with **care coordination and continuity of care** for a patient going into medical detox. A case manager was working with a client who was

experiencing psychosis and having a hard time engaging. The client was not interested in a nurse evaluating their wound but accepted a wound care kit. They later asked their case manager for another and have **increased engagement** with the client.

4) Wound care kits have improved workflow on mobile vans and street teams.

Nurses report the wound care kits have addressed challenges with limited **storage space** on vans which involves constant **restocking**. Two or three patients with wound care needs can diminish the entire supply for the day. The kits allow for meeting patients needs while maintaining a steadier supply.

Street med nurses would previously use supplies from their own packs, which would diminish their supply and either limit caring for other patients or require more time to gather additional supplies. Another benefit to the kits is that the contents is **standardized**, so there's less effort required to determine how many supplies to give.

Opportunities for Improvement

Community members had lots of great suggestions for changes/additions to the wound care kits. Some suggested smaller kits that take up valuable room in backpacks and could be given out "everywhere, like how they have condoms available." Community members also shared what they would want added to the kits, which includes: smaller/different size quality bandages (ex: butterfly), Narcan, wound super glue, ibuprofen or aspirin, socks to help keep bandages on, etc.

"People need to go to a place where they can rest for a few days. Not just a five minute restroom."

-Community Member

Nurses have also noted an opportunity to provide more instructions on Xeroform as folks are the least familiar with this type of supply. They considered leaving it out of kits but making it easily available to grab and include when really needed.

*"I've had MRSA three times –
while inside. Wound wash
became my best friend when
living outside."
-Community Member*

*"It doesn't matter
where you go, it
matters who treats you.
Some treat you like shit.
It depends on who is at
the [hospital/clinic]."
-Community Member*

*"I made friends with a guy at
the Chevron. I clean the
bathroom and get to clean my
wounds."
-Community Member*

*"Believe me I'm already
humiliated and bummed out
enough. I don't need anybody
looking down on me."
-Community Member*