

Nurses have a role to play in monitoring the success of strategies to reduce avoidable pressure ulcers and to provide accountability and maintain motivation

# A strategy to reduce avoidable pressure ulcers

## In this article...

- › The economic cost of pressure ulcers
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Pressure ulcers have a detrimental effect on patient health and wellbeing and place a significant economic burden on the NHS.

NHS Midlands and East, a cluster strategic health authority, has embarked on a programme of “ambitions” to ensure high-quality care and patient safety. The SHA identified the elimination of all grade 2, 3 and 4 pressure ulcers by December 2012 as its first ambition.

This article discusses the methods chosen for measuring and monitoring the incidence and prevalence of pressure ulcers, and the nurse's role.

**S**afety Express is a national programme based on the principles of improving patients' experience of care by minimising the four main avoidable harms in healthcare: pressure ulcers; falls; catheter-acquired urinary tract infections; and venous thromboembolism.

Safety Express is a workstream in the Quality, Innovation, Productivity and Prevention (QIPP) initiative. It was designed to improve health outcomes and the quality of care, as well as reduce costs associated with the above four harms.

Strategic health authorities (SHAs) are responsible for establishing their own programmes for avoiding these harms.

The NHS Management Board established four SHA clusters across England in October 2011. One of these was NHS Midlands and East, comprising three separate SHAs (NHS East of England, NHS East Midlands and NHS West Midlands).

This new cluster SHA identified a number of “ambitions”, particularly in the areas of ensuring patient safety and enhancing quality (NHS Midlands and East, 2011). It consulted on these “ambitions” in September 2011 and refined them; one related to eliminating pressure ulcers.

Before this cluster was created, the three separate SHAs had started work on pressure ulcer management and reduction. The formation of NHS Midlands and East led to the workstreams being combined into one comprehensive approach to managing and reducing pressure ulcers, under its “ambitions” programme.

This article outlines how these three programmes were brought together to form a plan for eliminating grade 2, 3 and 4 pressure ulcers by December 2012, and discusses the role that nurses play.

## Background

As well as having a detrimental effect on patients' health and wellbeing, pressure ulcers are also a significant economic burden to healthcare in the NHS and other countries.

In the US, for example, Bales and Padwojski (2009) suggested that the estimated cost to the hospital sector is \$1bn a year, a figure that is considered to be both unsustainable and unacceptable. The two national insurers in the US (Medicare and Medicaid) have decided they will no longer reimburse hospitals for treating a range of

## 5 key points

**1** Safety Express is a national programme to minimise the four main avoidable harms in healthcare, one of which is pressure ulcers

**2** Treating pressure ulcers is costly and eliminating them could save the NHS over £150m a year

**3** Pressure ulcers are more likely to occur in patients who are elderly, malnourished, dehydrated, obese and/or with underlying medical conditions

**4** The NHS Safety Thermometer and serious incident reporting can be used to measure the incidence and prevalence of pressure ulcers

**5** Nurses have a role in monitoring the incidence of pressure ulcers



Ulcers develop in 20% of inpatients