

## Market Insights: Wound dressings.. passing the baton to the finish line.



### Authors: Glenn Smith

Glenn has 27 years experience in health and social care. He is a mental health nurse by profession, but has worked across all primary and secondary care settings in mental health, tissue viability, patient safety, stroke research and advanced nursing practice. He has multiple regional and national awards and has presented and published nationally and internationally. He has interests in systems management, implementation of sustainable change in practice, data driven decision making and health economics.

### Stepping Ahead

The wound care market burgeons with dressings. To the untrained eye many dressings are indistinguishable. In a market such as this, standing out sometimes is much more about branding than it is function. Marketing machines churn to project a dressing's image into the popular psyche of the end user thus ensuring that the hand reaching into the dressing cupboard more often hovers over the box of that dressing than that of one of their competitors.

Sadly, sales due to marketing allure alone can obscure those dressings that are of the most benefit to patients, particularly if the dressings themselves are hampered by poorly communicated strengths. The strengths of a dressing are sometimes poorly explored at the evaluation stage leading to key headlines of what that dressing can do for a patient being missed, and leaving the patient poorer as a result of not being put in contact with the best dressing for them.

How is this rectified? Well, whilst marketing should not be abandoned, understanding a dressing range's virtues and place in the world is fundamental. Once these have been determined, then the marketing machine can do its thing and lead the charge to raise its profile. But that is not as easy as it seems. Language and methodology often constrain how well the dressing is perceived in the market and where it lands in the psyche of the end user.

Form follows function. A wound dressing should start with the wound itself and what its' needs are. What are the wounds needs? These are variable dependent on the stage at which the wound is, what caused the wound, and what type of wound it is. Wet wounds need absorbency, dry wounds need moisture. Chronic wounds need a kickstart, delicate wounds need protection to heal. To each wound need, the dressing concerned should fulfil this need. And because the needs of a wound change over time to move it towards the final goal of complete healing, the sole purpose of each dressing should be to moving the wound through a particular phase, not the whole thing. Measuring a dressings' efficacy based on the percentage of wounds healed misses the point. The dressing doesn't heal the wound, it shifts the wound towards the exit of healing. It carries the baton towards the finish line, but not all dressings' endpoints are healing. Some are cleaning a wound, some are eliminating infection, some reduce pain, some increase moisture.

The challenge then, not only from marketing, but also the end user, is to be able to place a dressing in the hands of the end user for the purpose it was made for. Firstly then, we must be clear about what the dressing is there to do. Secondly, the message needs to reflect this specific sliver of the wound's journey. Thirdly, this message should be intuitive enough for an end user to instinctively steer themselves towards this dressing as the one of choice for the wound at their fingertips. Done well, the dressings sell themselves. But only if the work is done early to understand the dressing and craft the vehicle of marketing that will sell it.