

Top to Toe

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The multi-disciplinary team approach is widely accepted as best practice for improved chronic disease outcomes. This collaboration of over twelve months highlights an inter-disciplinary initiative between Podiatrists, Occupational Therapists Dieticians and Allied Health Assistants in the care of clients experiencing hand and/or foot symptoms due to:

Arthritis,
Reynaud's Disease,
Chilblains,
Poor circulation to the extremities,
Joint inflammation,
Muscle stiffness and;
Chronic pain

According to (Valdes & Marikm, 2010) paraffin wax therapy is known to increase blood circulation, relax muscles and reduce pain and stiffness. Clients with the above conditions are more likely to experience symptoms in winter, therefore a twelve week foot-wax group led by Podiatry was introduced at this time. With these therapeutic benefits in mind, Occupational Therapy became involved at week four and at week five ran a foot and hand wax therapy group with Podiatry. Demand for this component has seen the need for a hand wax therapy group where exercises and specialised aids and equipment are used to further increase hand strength, joint mobility and reduce pain. During each weekly session, clients were asked about their progress with exercises and improvements noticed over the week. To ensure a holistic approach, Dietetics also provide input through a series of nutritional education sessions covering topics such as fish oil and other supplements in the management of arthritis and healthy eating. These group sessions now include input from an Exercise Physiologist and Women's Health Nurse.

The validated DASH Assessment Tool, clinical observation and client feedback were methods used to measure results. After completing the program, significant improvement was found in frequency of cramping, range of motion, strength, skin integrity, skin colour and level of sensation.

The community demand for multi-disciplinary groups such as these highlights a gap in co-ordinated services to address chronic conditions affecting hands and feet.