

A Podiatry service for homeless people: an audit of an assertive outreach podiatry service.

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Background: Qualitative literature suggests that foot problems, including cellulitis, fungal infections and over-use injuries are common in people experiencing homelessness, but there are limited quantitative Australian studies. Without knowing the frequency and severity of foot problems, it is difficult to develop services that meet the community's needs. The aim of this study was to describe the presenting podiatry complaints at a service targeted at homeless consumers in Melbourne.

Methods: An audit was undertaken of data on clients presenting at a podiatry service for people experiencing homelessness between January and March 2014. Data on age, gender, housing status and presenting complaints were analysed.

Results: 136 clients attended, 113 (83%) male, 23 (17%) female with an average age of 47yrs. 46 (34%) were primary, 24 (18%) secondary, 51 (38%) tertiary homeless and 14 (10%) were housed. All clients had multiple foot concerns, totalling 348 (mean 2.58).

The presenting complaints for groups by housing status were significantly different for footwear, diabetes and neurovascular issues, and wounds. More specifically, footwear and wound presentations were statistically more common (<0.0001 , <0.00015) among primary homeless clients than other groups. Diabetes and neurovascular issues were statistically more common among people experiencing tertiary homeless (<0.0001). There were no significant differences by housing status for skin and nail care, biomechanical complaints, or fungal infections.

Discussion: Homeless people in Melbourne present with complex and numerous foot problems. Complaints vary by housing classification. Highlighted is differing presentations for footwear, high risk of wounds, chronic disease. Basic foot care was highlighted as a need across all homeless categories. Further study regarding targeted wound, footwear and chronic disease's interventions would be worthwhile. The results of this review have shaped and improved our plan for services targeted to meet the needs of our homeless clients.