

Now you're healed, let's get you heeled; footwear for the high-risk foot.

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BACKGROUND: People with diabetes are at higher risk of foot complications, such as ulcerations and amputations, due to the higher rates of peripheral neuropathy and arterial disease. Appropriate footwear is a critical aspect of therapy for patients, which can be difficult to obtain. This project aimed to improve accessibility of appropriate footwear for patients attending the Melbourne Health Diabetic Foot Unit (DFU), a community high-risk foot service. Currently, this service has funds to assist with purchasing of therapeutic equipment such as footwear. These resources are limited, therefore need to be used sparingly. 2013-14 financial year data showed the DFU service spent \$12173 on footwear provision with a minimum cost of \$435 per patient.

METHOD: Barriers to using appropriate footwear were identified by patients including cost, access and availability. Clinicians identified health implications associated with this such as resulting re-ulceration, subsequent increased risk of infection and/or hospitalisation. Five podiatrists evaluated two brands of footwear focusing on appropriate features, price and accessibility. Key stakeholders were engaged with including finance, health and administration staff throughout the planning process. Three DFU sites were provided with footwear stock and a standardised fitting device. DFU podiatrists were educated to fit and provide footwear before the service was implemented in May 2015.

RESULTS: The new footwear cost \$85- \$165 per pair. Based on similar patient numbers this forecasts a savings for the service of approximately \$4000, reducing the cost of shoes by over 50%. The 215 patients assessed by the service annually now have access to footwear due to implementation of this initiative.

DISCUSSION: This new footwear provision program within the DFU now allow patient's access to appropriate footwear across multiple sites. Phase 2 of the project will investigate the costs associated, patient uptake and the timeliness of the service to measure its ongoing success.