What the Experts Say

About the Financial Implications of Pressure Ulcers

“The average hospital incurs $400,000 to $700,000 in direct costs to treat pressure ulcers annually. Most of that cost is not reimbursable. It is estimated that 20 minutes/day/patient of nursing time is related to services for pressure ulcers.”


“Pressure ulcers are estimated to affect 1 million people each year, leading to an annual cost of approximately $1.6 billion.”


“A study—limited to patients over age 55, length of stay at least 5 days, confined to a bed or chair, from 1988 to 1992 in an acute care hospital—found that the mean cost of caring for a patient who developed a pressure ulcer was $37,000 versus $13,924 for a patient without one.”


“A study was performed to calculate the cost of a pressure ulcer from time of development to time of healing. There were 45 ulcers treated for a total of 5200 days and a total cost of $122,887. The mean cost per pressure ulcer was $2,731.”


“Data from another study showed that a patient who develops a pressure ulcer in the hospital has a median length of stay 2 days longer and a cost of $1,500 more than those patients who did not develop an ulcer. This does not include the costs of any follow-up care for the treatment.”


“The cost to heal a complex, full-thickness PU may run as much as $70,000; the cost of for a less serious PU may range from $2000 to $30,000.”


“Although the cost of pressure ulcer prevention remains elusive, costs associated with their treatment have been conservatively estimated to range from $500 to $50,000 per ulcer, with more severe wounds being significantly more expensive to manage than less severe ulcers. Presently, approximately 1.5 to 3 million adults suffer with pressure ulcers.”


“Once a pressure ulcer develops, longer hospitalization and more nursing time are required, resulting in higher costs. Pressure ulcers tracked across multiple healthcare settings cost, on average, between $1,119 and $10,185 to treat while the management of severe wounds may cost as much as $55,000.”


“Most recently, the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (formerly the Health Care Financing Administration) included pressure ulcers as one of three sentinel events for long-term care; therefore, the formation of a pressure ulcer or subsequent deterioration of a pressure ulcer can lead to significant monetary penalties (maximum $10,000/day) in long-term care.”


“Finally, one study proved that the cost of prevention was less than the cost of treatment for a pressure ulcer. The study also states that the intensity of preventative measures needs to reflect the level of risk for ulcer development, to justify the costs of the preventative measures.”