Chronic wounds affect 270,000 Australians. These are wounds that haven’t healed within 4 weeks and can remain so unless the underlying health problems are managed and appropriate dressing choices are made. More than 25% of residents in Aged Care Facilities have a wound. Wound care accounts for more than 50% of community nursing. In Australia, 35,000 lower limb amputations occur to a non-healing diabetic wound per year (1 every 15 minutes). In acute care hospitals, 15% of patients have a preventable hospital acquired wound*.

Both the Federal and State Governments have provided funding for various projects across Australia to address the increasing problems of chronic wounds. In Western Australia, Wounds West was established in 2008 to bring together WA Health, Silver Chain Nursing Association and Curtin University to develop safe sustainable systems for the prediction, prevention and management of wounds.

Wound care clinicians across Australia can access this information and education electronically and people with wounds in WA can contact Wounds West for support. 1300 WOUNDS (1300 968 637).

In Victoria, the “Strengthening Wound Care Initiative” has established a three year project funding five regional Clinical Nurse Consultants to deliver specialist wound care to people who receive District Nursing services throughout country Victoria.

Information brochures have been developed by the regional group nurses to illustrate how to improve healing. Ask your nurse or wound professional to source them.

As part of the Federal Government’s Collaborative Research Centre Program, 28 million dollars came from federal funding to establish the Wound Management Innovation Centre. This is based at the Queensland University of Technology and will link together research scientists and wound practitioners across Australia. This involves several universities from different states, health organisations and district nursing services that provide wound care, including Wounds West from Western Australia.

This funding will extend over 8 years to improve wound healing and quality of life for people with wounds, and provide cost-effective wound care that lessens the burden on the health system. Eleven projects have already commenced. The Australian Wound Management Association is involved in one of these projects to raise awareness about venous leg ulceration and how to get help.

Information relating to wound care, education and clinics can be found on the Australian Wound Management Association website via the state links. The long-term goal of this project is to improve access and subsidy of services needed by people suffering other chronic wounds.

What can people in the community do if a wound is not healing?

Extensive information and resources can be accessed by your health professional to help you. Healing a chronic wound is a complex process that involves more than the dressing and a visit from your GP or nurse.

If your wound has not improved within 4 weeks or healed within 3 months and you are still unsure of what caused the wound, or why the healing is delayed, then take an active role with your health professional to identify what is the underlying cause of the wound, the reasons for the delay in healing, and seek help to apply clear strategies that can be measured.

For example:
- assess the pain,
- take a weekly photo,
- measure the length and width
- observe the colour of the wound bed (aim for red or pink)
- assess the level of swelling, and be conscious of the symptoms of an infection

If there is no improvement in the wound seek referral to a specialist wound clinic so any new innovations can be discussed and a team of people can work towards a solution.

To help raise awareness about the costs of wound care, support the Wound Awareness Campaign in your state on March 26th for Wound Awareness Week.

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*Referenced from:
Wound Management Innovation CRC Newsletter 2010 and 2011

Links of Interest:
Wound Management Innovation CRC - www.woundcrc.com
Government of Western Australia, Department of Health - www.health.wa.gov.au/woundswest/home
Victorian Government - www.vic.gov.au
Australian Wound Management Association - www.awma.com.au