COCHRANE PRIMARY HEALTH CARE FIELD

PEARLS Practical Evidence About Real Life Situations

Limited evidence for the effectiveness of burn wound dressings

Clinical question	How effective are wound dressings for superficial and partial thickness burns?
Bottom line	A number of dressings appear to have some benefit over standard chlorhexidine impregnated gauze dressings in the management of superficial and partial thickness burns. These include hydrocolloid, silicon nylon, antimicrobial (containing silver), polyurethane film and biosynthetic dressings. The benefit relates to time to wound healing, the number of dressing changes and the level of pain experienced.
Caveat	Most of the trials were small (only 6 had more than 80 patients), and many had methodological limitations. Many of the trials failed to adequately assess the depth of burns. The use of silver sulphadiazine (SSD) as a comparator on burn wounds for the full duration of treatment needs to be reconsidered, as a number of studies showed delays in time to wound healing and increased number of wound dressing applications in patients treated with SSD dressings.
Context	Superficial burns are those which involve the epidermal skin layers and partial thickness burns involve deeper damage to structures such as blood vessels and nerves. There are many dressing materials available to treat these burns but none have strong evidence to support their use.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Wasiak J et al. Dressings for superficial and partial thickness burns. Cochrane Reviews 2008, Issue 4. Article No. CD002106. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD002106.pub3. This review contains 26 trials involving 1552 participants.
PEARLS 138, January 2009, written by Brian R McAvoy	

[References]

PEARLS are succinct summaries of Cochrane Systematic Reviews for primary care practitioners. They are funded by the New Zealand Guidelines Group.

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