

Podiatry in Harm Reduction

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Introduction



Injecting drug use can result in an array of medical complication all of which carry significant financial impacts on the health care system and potential harms to the client.

**450,000**

Australians living with chronic wounds*

**\$3b**

The cost of chronic wound management on the Australian health care system*

**8000**

Lower limb extremity amputations per year**

**1**

Lower limb extremity amputation per hour**

*Wounds Australia, 2024, <https://woundsaustralia.org/>

**Limbs4Life, 2024, <https://www.limbs4life.org.au/>

Living with chronic wounds

The reality of living with chronic wounds is much more complex than just statistics on paper

- **Reduced quality of life**
- **Living with pain**
- **Reduced social life**
- **Impacts on mental health and mood**
- **Financial impacts**
 - Impacted ability to work
 - Co-payments for dressings and medical appointments
 - Travel costs to appointments

Where does podiatry fit in?



Every podiatrist in Australia has the skills, knowledge and equipment to be able to perform neurovascular and dermatological assessments. We have the ability to note early and subtle changes in circulation and neurological function.

Vascular Assessment

- **Doppler ultrasound**
- **Toe pressure**
- **Visual signs and symptoms**

These assessments identify how much healthy blood is getting down to the feet and is a solid indicator of healing ability. By tracking the results over a period, we can detect early signs of change and deterioration and make appropriate and early referrals.



Neurological assessment

- **Protective nerves**
- **Large fiber nerves**

Peripheral neuropathy is a condition where the nerves, often at the extremities, are damaged. Presentations and symptoms of peripheral neuropathy can vary from complete numbness, balance and coordination issues and nerve pain.



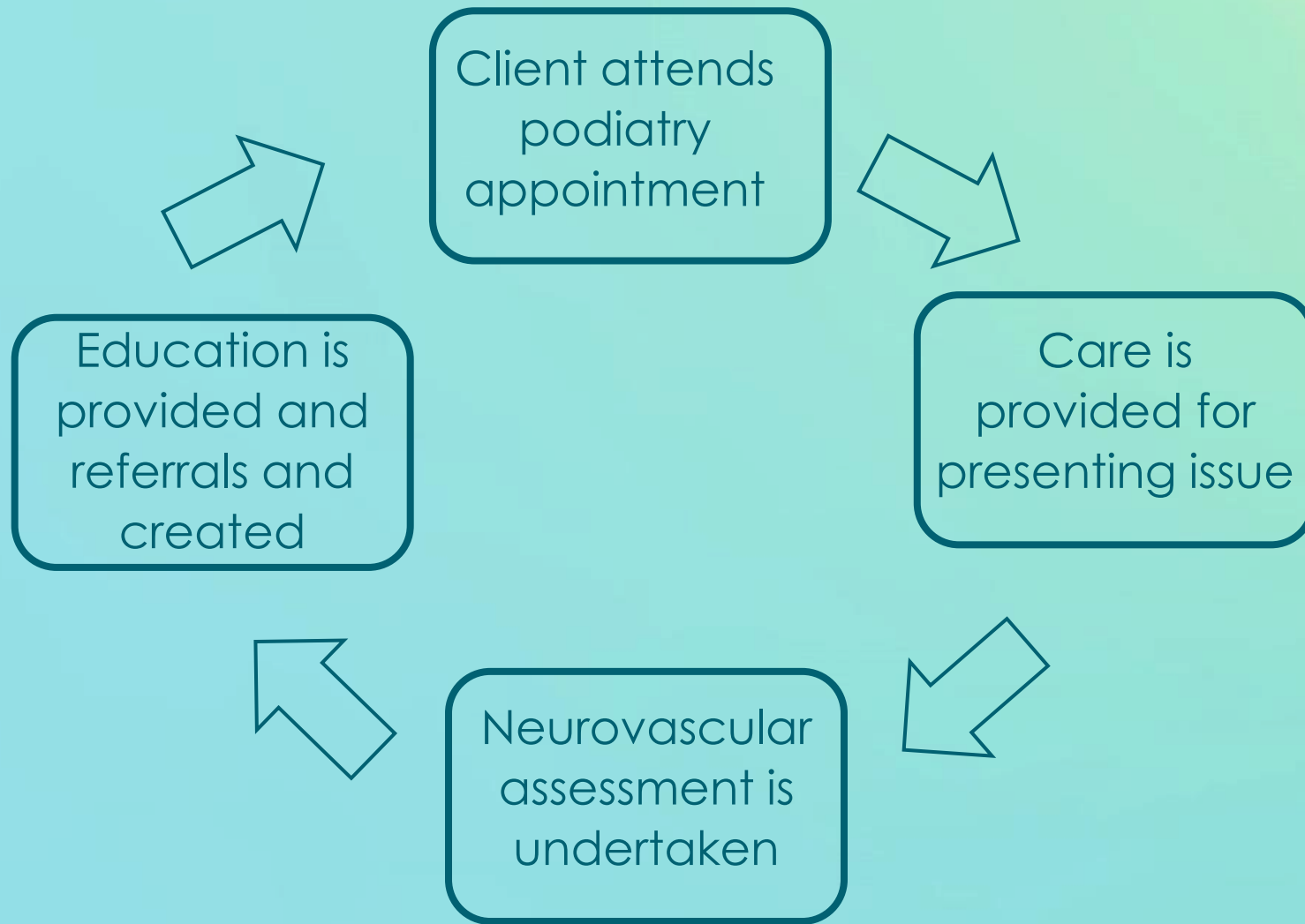
Dermatological Assessment

- Bacterial infections at injecting sites
- Breaks in skin leading to entry portals for bacteria
- Cellulitis
- Reduced skin integrity
- Wounds

Equipment required

All equipment required is portable and lightweight, meaning that all of these assessments can be undertaken outside of a hospital, or traditional clinical setting if required.

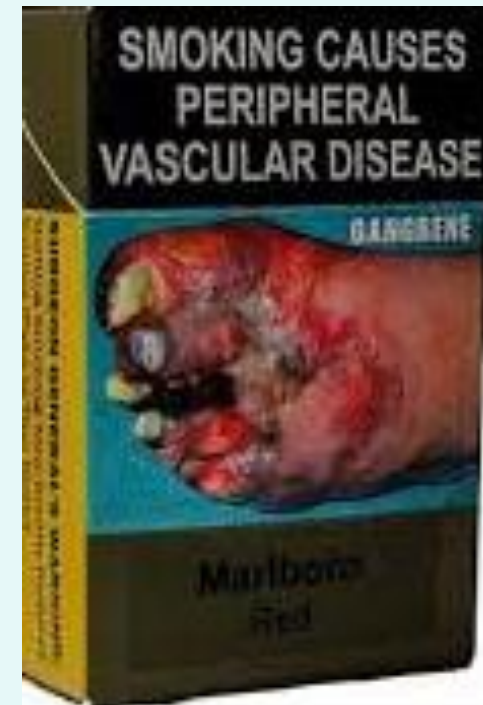




Taking time to build rapport and trust is important, and we can slowly spread out these assessments over a period of appointments if required.

Alcohol and Nicotine

Excessive alcohol use is linked to peripheral neuropathy and **smoking** is linked to reduced cardiovascular health and circulation.



Next Steps



Upskilling and further education in the AOD space for podiatrists

Accurate statistics around the prevalence of lower limb wounds and amputation directly related to drug use.



Summary

Assessment, treatment and education in a community setting from allied health professionals has previously been overlooked in the harm reduction space but is a move to share the load in reducing stigma, improving quality of life, and costs across the health care system.

thank you

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