

## Press Release

For immediate release

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### **‘A Great Big Week For Legs & Feet’ first Legs Matter Week kicks off in London June 3-7**



*Caption: Legs Matter London coalition members (Back Row, Second Right) Dr Jemell Geraghty and Alison Hopkins (Seated,) with Legs Matter chair Dr Leanne Atkin (far left) and other coalition members.*

Every two hours in England, someone loses their leg due to a [non-healing wound](#) - ‘A Great Big Week For Legs & Feet’, the first, national Legs Matter Awareness Week, June 3-7, is being held to urge people to ‘stand up’ to one of the UK’s biggest health challenges.

Locally, in 2016-17, across [Tower Hamlets CCG region](#) it is estimated that 382 people had diabetic foot ulcers costing the NHS an estimated £5.5 million and there were 80 resulting amputations. In [Barking and Dagenham CCG region](#) it is estimated that 286 people had diabetic foot ulcers costing the NHS an estimated £3.2 million and there were 112 resulting amputations and in [Central London and Westminster CCG region](#) it is estimated that 172 people had diabetic foot ulcers costing the NHS an estimated £2.7 million and there were 32 resulting amputations.

Pamela, 51, from Stepney, Tower Hamlets, has sickle cell disease, which can make people prone to leg ulcers. She has compression therapy for two leg ulcers at Accelerate Community Interest Company (CIC), Mile End Hospital, London, which specialises in wound and lymphoedema care. The problem started when she was 35, while studying at university and raising her two children. What she initially thought was a paper cut, turned into a 20cm leg ulcer.

Pamela said: “Leg ulcers don't just happen to elderly people. They can happen to anyone. It’s the sort of pain where all you can do is cry because there’s nothing you can do about it.

“It breaks my heart that I missed out on doing things with my children when they were younger. My brother would take my kids roller skating in Regent’s Park and I could never join them. They’re older now but I’ll never get those years back.

“Since starting compression therapy at Accelerate, my ulcers have healed so much faster. They care for the person, not just the wound. My ulcers are quite stubborn and I’m in a more positive frame of mind now. I believe I can heal.”

Alison Hopkins, CEO of Accelerate CIC, is urging people to play their part by checking their own and others’ legs and feet for 10 possible problems including swollen, tender legs or sores that won’t heal and to [get involved](#) by holding their own ‘Legs Matter Natter’, to take action with the ‘Legs Matter Pledge’ and by ‘Sharing Your One Big Thing’ - one important fact people wished they had known earlier about leg and foot health.

She said: “There are more than a million people suffering with lower leg and feet disorders - many of which are life changing. These conditions are often overlooked by patients, carers and clinicians. We are passionate about changing this.

“We want people to check their own and others’ legs and feet and to speak to a pharmacist, nurse, podiatrist or GP if they are concerned. Getting early treatment makes all the difference and prevents the condition becoming more serious.”

She is kicking off the week with an Awareness Event for people running on June 4, from 10am to 2pm, at the Ideas Store, Bow, with a second event on June 6, from 10am to 2pm at St Joseph's Hospice, Hackney.

A special joint Sickle Cell Leg Ulcer Event with the Sickle Cell Society will be held on June 4, from 5-7pm, at the Education Centre, Mile End Hospital, Bancroft Road, London, for anyone with sickle cell ulcers and clinicians.

And London-based Legs Matter coalition member Dr Jemell Geraghty will be carrying out leg and feet checks and giving advice to homeless people at one of the London hostels on June 3, supported by the London Network of Nurses and Midwives Homelessness Group.

She is also holding a ‘Legs Matter Natter’ at the European Wound Management Association event in Gothenburg from June 4-7, raising awareness with fellow Tissue Viability Society trustees wearing brightly coloured socks and tights.

Each year, it is estimated that more than a million people in the UK suffer from serious leg and foot conditions and the resulting delays to correctly diagnose and treat them can cause unnecessary suffering, disability, amputation and even death.

Now a group of the UK’s leading lower limb clinicians, led by the Tissue Viability Society, have joined forces to encourage people to check their legs and feet, to get medical help fast and to highlight what level of care patients have a right to.

Costing the NHS up to [£5.3 billion annually](#), leg and foot ulcers, oedema (a failure of the lymphatic system), narrowing of the arteries and other serious problems need to be treated quickly and correctly to reduce the risk of non-healing wounds, secondary health problems and deteriorating health. An [NHS England study](#) estimates that having effective care early, reduces leg ulcer healing times from around two years to just a few months and is 10 times cheaper. But many patients suffer unnecessarily for several years due to a lack of knowledge and not accessing the right care.

Supported by NHS England, a group of eight health care charities and not-for-profit organisations have come together to tackle the issue. As part of this, they have produced an [online](#) checklist for people, including health care professionals, to recognise the signs and symptoms of lower leg and foot problems.

Leading clinicians from The Tissue Viability Society, The British Lymphology Society, Accelerate CIC, The College of Podiatry, The Society of Vascular Nurses, The Lindsay Leg Club Foundation, Foot in Diabetes UK and The Leg Ulcer Forum have formed Legs Matter and want to ensure that anyone with a lower leg or foot problem understands their condition and gets the urgent care and support that they need.

A patient will encounter a number of people along their journey to diagnosis and treatment – from the pharmacist, to the practice and community nurse, to the GP and beyond. The Legs Matter coalition want to make sure that every person, including the patient, has the information that they need to take the best steps towards healthy, pain-free legs and feet.

You can find top tips for leg and foot health in the Legs Matter leaflet and order [a free Action Pack](#). Let us know what you're up to and what you've pledged on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#) using the hashtag #legsmatter, or drop us an [email](#).

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#### **Note to Editors:**

Access reports and high resolution images of Pamela [here](#) along with her [full story](#).

[Other patient stories are here.](#)

During the week, group members and their supporters are holding a series of nationwide events for both the public and health professionals, including working alongside homeless organisations in London, the first Legs Matter Conferences in Oxford and Newcastle and raising the issue with world-leading vascular experts in London.

A [Headline Report](#) by Dr Atkin reveals how living with long-term leg and foot conditions can lead to loneliness and feeling isolated. Other leg and feet facts:

- Annually in the UK, [730,000 people will have a leg ulcer](#), [169,000 will have diabetic foot ulcers](#) and a further [100,000 each year will suffer from lymphoedema](#) (failure of the lymphatic system)
- In addition, narrowing of the arteries (peripheral arterial disease or PAD) [affects one in five people over the age of 60 in the UK](#) who are at risk of lower limb loss and increased risk from death from heart attack and stroke

- Each year, complications among patients with diabetes and PAD result in 5,000 – 6,000 lower limb amputations
- The cost of caring for people with diabetic foot ulcers is estimated to be [£650 million](#), predominantly from nursing care and admissions – diverting resources from other patients and creating huge workforce pressures
- Just 47 per cent of leg ulcers [healed within one year](#)
- [Chronic oedema](#) affects more than [429,000 people](#) in the UK and is rising year-on-year due to an aging population and growing levels of obesity
- [Every hour in the UK](#) someone over 50 has part of their foot amputated
- Amputations are [70% higher](#) in the UK's Black population
- [There is a North/South divide](#) with major amputation rates 30% higher in Northern England compared with the South.

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