

## Press Release

For immediate release

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### **'A Great Big Week For Legs & Feet' - first Legs Matter Awareness Week kicks off in Scotland June 3-7**



Every two hours, 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.

In Scotland, Lymphoedema affects over 20,000 people, including Grangemouth man, Barry Heggie, who developed lymphoedema after surgery for a dislocated knee. Once a keen sportsman, the swelling pain and recurrent cellulitis severely debilitated him. Cellulitis and delayed wound healing are complications of lymphoedema. Now as part of Legs Matter Week, the 60-year-old from Grangemouth is urging others not to ignore swelling in the foot or leg that doesn't go down on resting it.

He said: "I used to play football and squash. After my surgery the swelling didn't go away. It took a long time for it to be recognised as lymphoedema. Treatment by community nurses helped initially but once I started to get cellulitis every few months the swelling and pain increased with every infection. I could hardly walk, put on a lot of weight and felt really low.

"Once I started to get specialist treatment things improved and I haven't had an infection for over two years. I am still working, trying to lose weight and be more active and feel in more control and supported. I now know there are guidelines for treating cellulitis specifically in people with lymphoedema. Anyone who has persistent swelling should seek medical help if treatment isn't helping. I would encourage them to ask for a specialist referral as I didn't realise how much could be done for lymphoedema and how much I could do to help myself."

Legs Matter coalition member [Margaret Sneddon](#) and Margaret-Anne Garner from the NHS Forth Valley Lymphoedema Service at [Strathcarron Hospice](#) are urging people in Scotland to play their part. They want people to check 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.

Lymphoedema specialist Margaret Sneddon, who is an honorary senior research fellow at the University of Glasgow and vice chair of the [British Lymphology Society](#) 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."

Across NHS Forth Valley there will be a number of events, including a Legs Matter Awareness Stand at Carronvale Medical Centre in Denny on the morning of June 5 and Torwood Garden Centre in the afternoon. At the events, people will be encouraged to 'Take the Pledge' to check their legs and feet for problems and challenge at least one other person to do the same. There will also be a 'Legs Matter Natter with Scottish Lymphoedema Specialists in Motherwell.

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 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 or 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.

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 a 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 your [free resources](#). 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:**

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

And [Headline Report](#) by Legs Matter chair 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 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](#)
- 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 are geographical differences with major amputation rates 30% higher in Northern England compared with the South.

**Media contact:** Access reports, photos and other patients' stories click [here](#).

For more information or to request an interview, please contact Margaret-Anne Garner, Lymphoedema Specialist, Strathcarron Hospice, NHS Forth Valley, Tel. 01324 826222; Email [LymphoedemaScotland@gmail.com](mailto:LymphoedemaScotland@gmail.com)