

# The epidemiology, management and impact of surgical wounds healing by secondary intention: a research programme including the SWHSI feasibility RCT

Ian Chetter,<sup>1,2\*</sup> Catherine Arundel,<sup>3</sup> Kerry Bell,<sup>3</sup>  
Hannah Buckley,<sup>3</sup> Karl Claxton,<sup>4</sup>  
Belen Corbacho Martin,<sup>3</sup> Nicky Cullum,<sup>5</sup> Jo Dumville,<sup>5</sup>  
Caroline Fairhurst,<sup>3</sup> Eileen Henderson,<sup>2</sup>  
Karen Lamb,<sup>6</sup> Judith Long,<sup>2</sup> Dorothy McCaughan,<sup>7</sup>  
Elizabeth McGinnis,<sup>8</sup> Angela Oswald,<sup>2</sup>  
Pedro Saramago Goncalves,<sup>4</sup> Laura Sheard,<sup>7</sup>  
Marta O Soares,<sup>4</sup> Nikki Stubbs,<sup>6</sup> David Torgerson<sup>3</sup>  
and Nicky Welton<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hull York Medical School, University of York, York, UK

<sup>2</sup>Hull University Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Hull, UK

<sup>3</sup>York Trials Unit, Department of Health Sciences, University of York, York, UK

<sup>4</sup>Centre for Health Economics, University of York, York, UK

<sup>5</sup>Division of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work, School of Health Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

<sup>6</sup>Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust, Leeds, UK

<sup>7</sup>Department of Health Sciences, University of York, York, UK

<sup>8</sup>Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Leeds, UK

<sup>9</sup>School of Social and Community Medicine, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK

\*Corresponding author [ian.chetter@hey.nhs.uk](mailto:ian.chetter@hey.nhs.uk)

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## Plain English summary

### **The SWHSI research programme and feasibility RCT**

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## Plain English summary

**S**urgical wounds healing by secondary intention are open wounds that are left to heal from the base up. At the start of this work, there was little information on these wounds, their management, impact on patients and which treatments offered best value for money. The overall aim of this research was therefore to describe, characterise and identify the nature and impact of surgical wounds healing by secondary intention and the current evidence for effective treatments.

This research found the following:

- Surgical wounds healing by secondary intention are very common and affects approximately 4 out of 10,000 adults in the general population.
- Patients may have their wound for a long time and this has an impact on their well-being and daily life.
- Patients are often shocked when they first see their wound and are concerned about what others think of it.
- Several factors are associated with delayed wound healing (e.g. wound infections and wound size).
- Wound dressings are often used as the first treatment, but sometimes a vacuum device called negative-pressure wound therapy is used. Health professionals are using this treatment more frequently.
- This research looked at how NHS patients receiving negative-pressure wound therapy fared when compared with patients receiving standard dressings. This research was not experimental: health professionals and patients chose the treatments they received.
- Definitive evidence about the comparative effects of negative-pressure wound therapy and standard dressing may still be required in the form of a large randomised clinical trial; our small pilot study has shown that such a study is possible.
- Further studies are required to assess other treatments for other surgical wounds healing by secondary intention and to improve patient well-being and care.
- Specialised analysis methods showed that negative-pressure wound therapy was less effective and did not offer value for money compared with standard wound dressings. It is possible that these findings are due to differences between the people receiving the different treatments, rather than the treatments themselves.



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