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Moving treatment of diabetic foot ulcers from the hospital to the patient's home

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Objective: To investigate the feasibility of moving the hospital expert to the home of patients with diabetic foot ulcers by use of technology and thereby establish a telemedical consultation as an alternative to a visit to the outpatient clinic.

Methods: Participatory Design. The project was conducted in 3 phases: (1) workshops and field studies, (2) experiments and (3) pilot tests, where we replaced traditional visits to the outpatient with video consultations in the patient's home. This presentation reports on the pilot tests including 5 patients, 3 relatives, 5 visiting nurses, 3 expert nurses and 1 hospital doctor. The setting was The Diabetic Foot Centre, Department of Medicine M (Endocrinology and Diabetes), Aarhus University Hospital, Denmark and homes of the patients.

Results: The setup consisted of a combination of mobile video phones and a web based ulcer record. Using this system, the doctor and expert nurses were able to evaluate the ulcer from a distance and to prescribe treatment. The video consultation was collaboration between experts, the visiting nurse and the patients/relatives – all involved was satisfied and experienced the collaboration as teamwork. The visiting nurses experienced increased security in treating the foot ulcer and characterized the consultations as a learning situation. The patients expressed satisfaction and security being treated by the experts from a distance. Furthermore, avoiding waiting time and transportation was a great advantage.

Conclusion: Telemedical consultations, applying simple technology and close collaboration between visiting nurses and hospital experts, were a viable alternative to visits to the outpatient clinic in the cases encountered in the pilot study. The combination of video phones and online ulcer records was a useful and sufficient diagnostic aid.