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## — APA Center for — Psychology and Health

### Briefing Series on the Role of Psychology in Health Care *Pressure Ulcers (Skin Sores) Care*

- Pressure ulcers (skin sores) are a common complication for individuals surviving spinal cord injury (SCI) and have now been identified as the most prevalent complication for patients surviving SCI.<sup>1,2</sup>
- In rehabilitative services, SCI is a continuing and expensive problem. The current prevalence of SCI in the United States is about 40 injuries per million people, with about 11,000 new cases each year.<sup>2</sup>
- An average inpatient treatment cost of pressure ulcers is \$129,248, and \$124,327 per person for ulcers acquired in the community.<sup>3</sup>
- A pressure ulcer means increased time in the hospital, leading to a significant increase in length of stay and related costs of care—a pressure ulcer that takes less than one day to develop can lead to weeks or months of additional time in the hospital.

#### **| How Psychologists Can Help**

- The widespread assumption is that pressure ulcers are an unavoidable complication in the SCI population. This myth persists despite the demonstrated efficacy of instituting behavioral interventions.
- Behavioral change has been shown to reduce the incidence of pressure ulcers.<sup>4</sup>
- Psychologically based behavioral interventions in treating pressure ulcers have resulted in financial savings of more than \$452,000.<sup>4</sup>
- In a 2,500-bed county teaching hospital with a Level 1 trauma center, a psychologist and nurse team instituted a system-wide behavioral program to reduce pressure ulcers.
- The target goal of the program was to utilize behavioral/learning theory strategies to increase pressure sore preventive behaviors. In 181 (98%) of the 185 SCI patients, only 4 patients developed pressure ulcers, lowering the postintervention incidence to 2% instead of the expected 34%. At an average cost of \$129,248 per individual for ulcers acquired during inpatient hospital stays, the reduction in ulcers saved the hospital up to \$7,625,632.

- The state of Florida is considering adopting the program statewide because this intervention improves the quality of survivors' lives and is proven to be highly cost effective.

## **References**

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