Research reveals rate of potential amputations for diabetic foot disease

New Zealand is neck and neck with Australia on rates of Diabetes – but this is one race with our neighbours we do not want to win.

Diabetes is a significant public health challenge in New Zealand. There are over 270,000 people with Type 2 diabetes according to Ministry of Health officials.

Claire O’Shea, Researcher and Podiatrist at Waikato District Health Board, has recently completed a study on ‘the prevalence of diabetic foot disease in the Waikato region’ that updates the figures for potential high risk foot problems and amputations in New Zealand.

Based on her findings in the Waikato study, it can be estimated that over one-third of New Zealanders with diabetes have moderate to high-risk diabetic foot disease.

Of the 257,700 with diagnosed diabetes, 13 percent are at risk having a foot amputation. That represents around 33,500 people, at a cost of at least $35,000 each, potentially as cost of more than $1,172,000,000.

Foot disease becomes a problem when people with diabetes loose feeling in their feet and are unable to detect potential problems that lead to ulcers which result in the need to amputate toes or feet.

PodiatryNZ Chief Executive, Jennifer Pelvin says that base on similar studies in Australia and the UK, early diagnosis and intervention can reduce diabetic foot ulcerations and lower limb amputation and up to 50 percent of amputations could be prevented.

“We need to get the message out to the 257,700 people in New Zealand with Type 2 diabetes that they need to look after their feet,” she says. “It is really important they have support from their family, their partners and the healthcare professionals involved in diabetic foot disease.”

Jennifer says podiatry services are a cost effective way of keeping people on their feet. “Once someone has an amputation they need all sorts of support - and they’re often out of the workforce which has a detrimental affect on their families also.”

She says the expected increase in the rates of diagnosed diabetes will reinforce the need for increased funding and promotion of podiatric care across New Zealand.

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