

Repositioning and Pressure Area Care: The Dolphin Therapy Support Surface and Eleganza 5 Bed Significantly Improved Quality of Life for a Highly Complex Patient

- ↑ Skin improved
- ↓ Pain reduced
- ↑ Adherence to care improved

Introduction

Dennis* (age 68) was admitted to hospital from home with severe shortness of breath and poor blood flow to his legs. He was diagnosed with an aortic aneurysm.

The reduced blood flow to his legs had resulted in ischaemia and gangrene to his lower left leg.

He was taken to theatre for a below knee amputation of his left leg, but suffered a right sided CVA in theatre, leaving him with severe left sided weakness.

His past medical history included:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Deep vein thrombosis
- Atherosclerosis
- Myocardial infarction
- Non-Hodgkins lymphoma

Prior to his operation, Dennis' skin was intact, but at high risk of breakdown.

**Dennis is not the patient's real name*

Clinical Challenges

Following his surgery, Dennis was nursed on a general med/surg bed and a traditional alternating pressure mattress. Unfortunately, he was non-adherent to repositioning due to pain, and developed a Category 4 pressure ulcer to his right buttock and a DTI to his right heel.

These areas of skin breakdown, together with his amputation wound, were resulting in excruciating pain whenever any hands-on interventions were attempted. All of these factors were increasing the risk of further skin breakdown, and the situation was highly distressing for Dennis, his family, and his caregivers.

Dennis couldn't tolerate lying on his left side or back for long due to pain. He therefore spent a lot of time on his right hand side, and the staff were worried about further skin breakdown on that side.



Patient Objectives

- Reduce pain
- Improve comfort
- Treat existing skin damage
- Prevent further skin breakdown
- Improve adherence to care
- Reduce turning/repositioning frequency

Introduction of the Dolphin Therapy Fluid Immersion Simulation Support Surface, then the Eleganza 5 Bed

Dolphin Therapy is a unique reactive support surface that simulates a fluid environment. Research has demonstrated that it maintains tissue symmetry,¹ minimises vascular occlusion,² and prevents tissue ischaemia even when the patient is nursed directly on a wound.³ Data collected from over 3,000 patients has demonstrated that it is extremely effective at prevention of skin damage. It has also improved comfort and pain management in over 99% of patients who had these as an objective, and helped to reduce turning frequency in 98% of patients. Adherence to care was improved in 94% of patients.⁴

The TVN assessed Dennis and arranged for him to be transferred onto a Dolphin Therapy surface, because of the very high risk of further skin breakdown, and to treat existing damage.

Dennis was more settled on the Dolphin Therapy surface, and said he was more comfortable and in less pain. His skin at that point had remained static, with no new breakdown. However, he was still in severe pain when being repositioned or having personal care; any form of hands-on care was still traumatic for him.

With this in mind, the Ward Manager contacted Medstrom's Clinical Advisor to ask if she could think of any solution. She suggested using an Eleganza 5 bed, with lateral tilt, to facilitate repositioning and reduce hands-on care. Eleganza 5 is a specialist bed, often used in intensive care.

When the Ward Manager saw a picture of the bed, she was hesitant to try it at first, because it had so many controls, and she thought the staff would not get to grips with how to use it. Medstrom's Clinical Advisor explained that they only need to know how to perform a few functions at first, and that they could learn how to use more functions once they got more familiar. The Ward Manager agreed to try the bed for Dennis' care.

Eleganza 5 has full platform electrically operated lateral tilt, up to 15° to both the left and right. It helps to reduce the amount of physical handling, and provides a more ergonomic position for caregivers to work at, as they are not stretching and bending over the patient.

It can be moved to lower angles of tilt (approximately 5° to 7°) by one caregiver, which helps to off-load and redistribute pressure. This helps to reduce the amount of hands-on repositioning required, as well as the number of staff needed.

The addition of the Eleganza 5 bed proved extremely beneficial for Dennis. Although he was still experiencing pain, he was able to tolerate being repositioned much better using lateral tilt, and was a lot more settled in himself during this procedure. He also tolerated being on his left side for longer, helping with pressure redistribution.

As the staff became more familiar with the bed, and received further training, they were able to use more functions, including the built-in Class III weighing scale, for regular Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool (MUST) assessments.

Dennis was nursed on the Eleganza 5 bed and Dolphin Therapy surface for a further four months, until he passed away peacefully.



Summary

The combination of the Eleganza 5 bed and Dolphin Therapy surface significantly improved Dennis' quality of life while he was nursed on them.

The Category 4 pressure ulcer, DTI and amputation wound all improved. No new areas of skin damage occurred. These achievements were remarkable given Dennis' pressure ulcer risk level, but they mirrored many other Dolphin Therapy patients' outcomes with similar risk scores and wounds.⁴

The Dolphin Therapy surface improved Dennis' comfort and helped reduce pain, but this was enhanced by the addition of the Eleganza 5 bed. The combination significantly reduced his pain further, reducing his anxiety and increasing overall comfort and well-being. It also meant he could tolerate repositioning, which improved adherence to care.

One of the original objectives was to reduce turning frequency, because of Dennis' pain. However, with addition of the Eleganza 5 bed, that objective was no longer applicable.

This case study demonstrated how Eleganza 5 can be used with great success outside of intensive care.



Comfort improved



Anxiety reduced



No new skin damage

References

1. CT scans from St Joseph's Hospital, Tampa, Florida.
2. Worsley PR et al (2015). The effects of a fluid immersion mattresses; an evaluation of fluid immersion therapy for the prevention of pressure ulcers. 18th Annual Meeting of the European Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel, 17th September 2015. Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Southampton.
3. Mayes KL et al (2012). Cost effective care without clinical compromise: Incorporating the Dolphin Fluid Immersion Simulation Mattress System into the postoperative care of patients undergoing myocutaneous flaps. Poster presented at Wild on Wounds National Conference, September 12 - 15, 2012, Las Vegas, NV.
4. Medstrom (2023). The effectiveness of Dolphin Therapy fluid immersion simulation support surface. Outcomes for over 3,000 highly complex patients. Available online: <https://www.medstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/SM1153-Dolphin-Therapy-3000-Patient-Outcomes-Report-Rev1-Mar-2023-1.pdf>



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Easier, Safer Repositioning: The Dolphin Therapy Support Surface and Eleganza 5 Combination Treated Skin Damage, Facilitated Repositioning and Reduced Pain

- ↑ Pressure ulcer healing
- ↓ Pain reduced
- ↑ Safer repositioning

Introduction

Vincent* (age 67) was admitted to hospital from home following a CVA, resulting in severe left sided weakness. He was in A&E for 40 hours, on a trolley with a standard foam mattress, before being moved to a ward.

His past medical history included:

- Hypertension
- Type 1 diabetes
- Peripheral vascular disease
- Transient ischaemic attacks
- Myocardial infarction

Unfortunately he developed a Category 3 pressure ulcer on his sacrum in A&E.

**Vincent is not the patient's real name*

Clinical Challenges

Vincent was placed on a traditional alternating pressure mattress when he first arrived on the ward. His PURPOSE-T pressure ulcer risk assessment was red (high risk).

In addition to the existing Category 3 pressure ulcer on his sacrum, he was at very high risk of further skin damage due to immobility, unstable blood glucose levels and poor peripheral circulation.

Within 24 hours of being on the ward, the Category 3 pressure ulcer had deteriorated to a Category 4.

Staff were finding it very challenging to reposition Vincent so he was off his sacral wound. They were using pillows, but these weren't working well and he was quickly rolling back onto them (and therefore onto the wound).

The caregivers had difficulty both repositioning Vincent and providing personal care. He wasn't able to assist, which further increased manual handling risks. He had significant pain on his affected side which became worse when he was handled or turned onto that side.



Patient Objectives

- **Treat existing skin damage**
- **Prevent further skin breakdown**
- **Improve pain management**
- **Improve comfort and sleep**

Introduction of the Dolphin Therapy Fluid Immersion Simulation Support Surface, then the Eleganza 5 Bed

Dolphin Therapy is a unique reactive support surface that simulates a fluid environment. Research has demonstrated that it maintains tissue symmetry,¹ minimises vascular occlusion,² and prevents tissue ischaemia even when the patient is nursed directly on a wound.³ Data collected from over 3,000 patients has demonstrated that it is extremely effective at treatment of skin damage, with 58% of wounds healed or improved at the end of placement. It has also improved comfort, pain management and sleep in over 99% of patients who had these as an objective.⁴

The TVN decided, after Vincent's pressure ulcer deteriorated from a Category 3 to 4, to step him up to a Dolphin Therapy surface. She hoped it would both help to treat the existing pressure ulcer and prevent further skin breakdown.

Vincent said he was more comfortable on the new surface, and in less pain. However, he was still in pain when being repositioned, and the TVN still wanted pressure off-loading from his sacrum.

Documentation of positioning was also proving problematic because Vincent was rolling back onto the pillows shortly after being turned.

When Medstrom's Clinical Advisor visited the ward to see how Dolphin Therapy was working for Vincent, the TVN commented:



"Vincent is doing well on Dolphin. He's **more comfortable**, his pressure ulcer is now **static** and he has **no further skin breakdown**.

"But we've still got a **problem with repositioning and off-loading** his sacral wound. What we really need is a **Dolphin that turns!**"

Medstrom's Clinical Advisor explained that the Eleganza 5 bed may work well for Vincent, in conjunction with Dolphin Therapy. Eleganza 5 is a specialist bed, often used in intensive care. However, it can also be of great benefit to general ward patients with particular challenges such as those being experienced by Vincent.

The bed has full platform electrically operated lateral tilt, up to 15° to both the left and right. It helps to reduce the amount of physical handling, and provides a more ergonomic position for caregivers to work at, as they are not stretching and bending over the patient. Dual-sided foot pedals allow the caregiver to tilt the bed without pressing a button, freeing up both hands to work with the patient.

It can be moved to lower angles of tilt (approximately 5° to 7°) by one caregiver, which helps to off-load and redistribute pressure. This helps to reduce the amount of physical repositioning required, as well as the number of staff needed. For personal care, with two caregivers, the bed can be tilted to 15°.

An Eleganza 5 bed was installed with the Dolphin Therapy surface. The staff tilted it by 6° to both the left and right to off-load pressure from the sacrum. They no longer needed to use pillows. It was better for Vincent, as it reduced physical handling with the associated pain, and was much easier for the staff to reposition him, and to provide personal care.

Summary

While the Dolphin Therapy surface was highly beneficial for Vincent, it didn't address all of his challenges. It helped to protect and heal his skin, but it couldn't turn to aid repositioning. Although turning mattresses are available, they do not offer the same level of immersion as Dolphin Therapy, and Vincent needed that very high level of support.

The addition of an Eleganza 5 bed addressed the off-loading, turning and repositioning challenges associated with Vincent's care. It also made accuracy and documentation of his care much easier; the precise times, position and angle could be recorded.

At the time of writing this case study, Vincent was still in hospital. All objectives for him had been met; his sacral pressure ulcer was healing, and he had no further skin breakdown. He was in less pain, due to both the Dolphin Therapy surface's immersive properties, and less hands-on care through using the lateral tilt on the bed. He was much more comfortable and sleeping better, with fewer direct nursing interventions needed.

A Healthcare Assistant commented to Medstrom's Clinical Advisor:

"The tilting bed has been a real **game changer** for nursing Vincent.

"It was taking three of us to turn him on his side, and three or four to provide personal care. Now, usually just **one person can reposition him much more quickly**. Personal care now only needs two of us. This has **freed up time**, is helping to **protect our backs** and is so **much nicer for Vincent**. He's far **more settled** now, and in a lot **less discomfort and pain**, which is great to see."



Skin improving



Comfort improved



Pain reduced

References

1. CT scans from St Joseph's Hospital, Tampa, Florida.
2. Worsley PR et al (2015). The effects of a fluid immersion mattresses; an evaluation of fluid immersion therapy for the prevention of pressure ulcers. 18th Annual Meeting of the European Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel, 17th September 2015. Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Southampton.
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Giving Back Control: How the Addition of an Eleganza 5 Bed to the Dolphin Therapy Surface Helped a Patient's Engagement with Care and Recovery

- ↑ Pressure ulcers healing
- ↑ Improved adherence to care
- ↑ Medically fit for discharge

Introduction

Lee* (age 48) was admitted to hospital from home following a heroin overdose. He was a long-term drug user, and in general poor health.

His past and current medical history included:

- Current drug abuse
- Previous alcohol abuse
- Liver disease
- Long-term suprapubic catheter
- Paraplegia following a road traffic collision

On admission to hospital, he had multiple areas of skin damage, acquired in the community. These included Category 4 pressure ulcers to his sacrum and left heel, a Category 2 pressure ulcer to his right heel and a DTI to his right buttock.

**Lee is not the patient's real name*

Clinical Challenges

Lee was very angry on admission to hospital. He was commenced on methadone to reduce heroin withdrawal symptoms. He didn't want to be in hospital, but knew he couldn't self-discharge as he wasn't well enough.

He already had significant skin damage, but was at high risk of further deterioration. This risk was compounded by his paraplegia, which had resulted in him being unable to feel anything from the waist down.

When Lee went to the ward, he was refusing care, shouting out and sometimes screaming with frustration whenever personal care or repositioning were suggested. As well as increasing the risk of further skin damage, the risk of developing a urinary tract infection was also increased, as the only catheter care he was allowing was emptying the bag.

The staff thought the reason for Lee's challenging behaviour was the complete loss of control he was feeling. He had gone from being largely independent at home to needing all care, and the only thing he now felt he could have some control over was his care.



Patient Objectives

- **Treat existing skin damage**
- **Prevent further skin breakdown**
- **Improve adherence to care**
- **Increase independence**
- **Achieve 'medically fit for discharge' status**

Introduction of the Dolphin Therapy Fluid Immersion Simulation Support Surface, then the Eleganza 5 Bed

When Lee was admitted to the ward, he was placed on a traditional alternating therapy mattress. However, it became quickly apparent that Lee was at extremely high risk of further skin deterioration. Therefore, the TVN decided a 'step up' to a Dolphin Therapy surface was necessary, and Lee agreed to this when the reasons were explained to him.

Dolphin Therapy is a unique reactive support surface that simulates a fluid environment. Currently, immersion (fluid simulation/air fluidised) is one of the only viable 'step up' options from a dynamic air mattress. Originally developed by the United States Navy to keep dolphins buoyant and healthy during extended periods out-of-water, it provides immersion and envelopment of the patient. This helps to maintain tissue symmetry,¹ maximise the contact surface area and minimise pressure. In turn, this minimises vascular occlusion² and helps to prevent tissue ischaemia, even when the wound is directly in contact with the surface.³

Data collected from over 3,000 patients nursed on Dolphin Therapy has demonstrated that it is extremely effective at treatment of skin damage, with 58% of wounds healed or improved at the end of placement.⁴

The Dolphin Therapy surface maintained Lee's wounds at a static level, with no deterioration. However, he was still largely non-adherent to care. On visiting the ward, Medstrom's Clinical Advisor found out about the challenges that Lee and the staff were experiencing, and suggested that an Eleganza 5 bed may help.

Eleganza 5 is a specialist bed, often used in intensive care. However, it can also be of great benefit to general ward patients such as Lee who have complex needs.

The bed has full platform electrically operated lateral tilt, up to 15° to both the left and right. It can also be moved to lower angles of tilt (approximately 5° to 7°) by one person, which helps to off-load and redistribute pressure. This helps to reduce the amount of physical repositioning required.

Medstrom's Clinical Advisor suggested that Lee could be shown how to tilt the bed laterally himself, using the hand-held control. He would then gain an element of control back as he'd be able to reposition himself. In turn, this would help with wound off-loading.

Giving Lee the control to use himself would be subject to dynamic risk assessment, but in principle the Ward Manager thought it could work. Lee was enthusiastic about the idea when asked, so an Eleganza 5 bed was installed with the Dolphin Therapy surface.

Medstrom's Clinical Advisor ensured that both Lee and the ward staff knew how to tilt the bed, and that if he was moving it on his own, to not go any further than 7°.

This relatively simple change had an extremely positive effect on Lee. He became much more engaged, less angry, and more adherent to care. He became adept at turning and repositioning himself, and, as he continued to improve, to move the bed into other positions.



Summary

The Dolphin Therapy surface was the best solution for Lee when he was admitted to the ward, due to the extent of skin damage he had already, and the risk of further deterioration. However, it didn't solve the problem of him feeling like he had no control over anything.

The addition of the Eleganza 5 bed was a pivotal point in Lee's engagement and subsequent recovery. By moving himself, he was off-loading pressure and also having a say in, and more control over his care.

Evidence shows large improvements are made when patients are actively involved in their care,^{5,6} including:

- Safety
- Patient satisfaction
- Adherence to care
- Health outcomes

This was certainly the case for Lee and he continued to improve. All objectives for him had been met; his wounds were all improving, with no new skin breakdown. He was much more adherent to care, and was now more independent, getting out of bed and into his wheelchair. Two months later, he was deemed medically fit for discharge and went home with community support.



Skin improving



Independence improved



Discharged home

References

1. CT scans from St Joseph's Hospital, Tampa, Florida.
2. Worsley PR et al (2015). The effects of a fluid immersion mattresses; an evaluation of fluid immersion therapy for the prevention of pressure ulcers. 18th Annual Meeting of the European Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel, 17th September 2015. Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Southampton.
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Comfortable and Peaceful: The Dolphin Therapy Support Surface and Eleganza 5 Bed Significantly Reduced Pain for a Patient Receiving End-of-Life Care

↑ Comfort improved

↓ Pain reduced

↑ Skin intact

Introduction

Barbara* (age 79) was admitted to hospital from home with urosepsis. She was unable to walk at home, and was usually hoisted between her bed and chair. However, she had been bedbound prior to admission due to severe pain around her rib cage, which became worse whenever she was moved.

X-rays on admission revealed several fractured ribs, which were thought to have been caused by the hoisting.

Her past medical history included:

- Osteoporosis
- Bilateral total hip replacements following two separate falls and fractures
- Fractured right humerus
- Fractured left wrist
- Chronic kidney disease
- Type 2 diabetes

On admission, Barbra had red and blanching areas to her sacrum, buttocks, and heels.

**Barbara is not the patient's real name*

Clinical Challenges

Although Barbara's skin was intact, she was clinically extremely unwell and at very high risk of pressure ulcer development. This was exacerbated because repositioning her was very difficult. She started screaming when anyone approached her, and whenever she was repositioned, due to the pain in her rib cage. The staff were anxious about causing more bone fractures and other trauma.

A support surface was needed to prevent skin breakdown, bearing in mind that repositioning was very difficult.

Barbara was treated actively for urosepsis, but responded poorly. She was identified as being at end-of-life, and palliative treatment was commenced.



Patient Objectives

- Reduce pain
- Improve comfort
- Prevent skin breakdown
- Reduce turning/repositioning frequency

Introduction of the Dolphin Therapy Fluid Immersion Simulation Support Surface and Eleganza 5 Bed

Dolphin Therapy is a unique reactive support surface that simulates a fluid environment. Research has demonstrated that it maintains tissue symmetry,¹ minimises vascular occlusion,² and prevents tissue ischaemia even when the patient is nursed directly on a wound.³ Data collected from over 3,000 patients has demonstrated that it is extremely effective at prevention of skin damage. It has also improved comfort and pain management in over 99% of patients who had these as an objective.⁴

The Ward Manager was familiar with the Dolphin Therapy surface and knew it would offer the best solution in these circumstances. It was promptly ordered and delivered, and Barbara was transferred onto it on the same day she was admitted to the ward.

The following morning, Barbara seemed visibly more settled and in less pain. However, she was still screaming when being repositioned. The staff were reluctant to reduce her turning frequency, as she was so vulnerable to skin breakdown.

Medstrom's Clinical Advisor visited the ward later that day to see how Dolphin Therapy was working for Barbara. When he heard about the problems with repositioning, he suggested the Eleganza 5 bed could help.

Eleganza 5 is a specialist bed, often used in intensive care. However, for patients such as Barbara, on a general ward, it can be extremely beneficial.

The bed has full platform electrically operated lateral tilt, up to 15° to both the left and right. It helps to reduce the amount of physical handling, and provides a more ergonomic position for caregivers to work at, as they are not stretching and bending over the patient.

It can be moved to lower angles of tilt (approximately 5° to 7°) by one caregiver, which helps to off-load and redistribute pressure. This helps to reduce the amount of physical repositioning required, as well as the number of staff needed. For personal care, with two caregivers, the bed can be tilted to 15°.

The Ward Manager agreed to try an Eleganza 5 bed in conjunction with the Dolphin Therapy surface for Barbara. She was nursed on both products for two weeks, until she passed away peacefully.



Skin intact



Peaceful



Pain reduced

Summary

The combination of the Eleganza 5 bed and Dolphin Therapy surface dramatically improved Barbara's quality of life in the two weeks she was nursed on them.

Because the bed was effectively doing most of the repositioning, and the surface prevented skin breakdown, care was more hands-off. This, in combination with the comfort that the immersive properties of Dolphin Therapy provides, greatly reduced her pain. She was no longer screaming, much more comfortable, and did not develop any more fractures.

The ward staff found caring for Barbara much easier with this bed and mattress combination. The number of staff needed to provide personal care and reposition her halved after the bed was introduced, from four to two, and two to one respectively.

The amount of time needed was also reduced, freeing staff up for other tasks to help Barbara and the other patients. In addition, the staff felt very relieved knowing how much more settled and comfortable Barbara now was.

Barbara passed away comfortable and pain-free. All objectives for her had been met; she was comfortable, no longer in pain, her skin remained intact, and hands-on repositioning was significantly reduced.

The Ward Manager commented to Medstrom's Clinical Advisor:

"I knew very quickly that **Dolphin Therapy** was the **best surface for Barbara**, but I'd not thought of **using it with a lateral tilting bed**.

"When you see beds like that, your first thought is ITU only. But it was **ideal for Barbara's care**. We were very well supported by Medstrom, but were pleasantly surprised at how easy the tilt and other bed functions we needed were to use. I would **definitely use this combination again** for the right patient."

References

1. CT scans from St Joseph's Hospital, Tampa, Florida.
2. Worsley PR et al (2015). The effects of a fluid immersion mattresses; an evaluation of fluid immersion therapy for the prevention of pressure ulcers. 18th Annual Meeting of the European Pressure Ulcer Advisory Panel, 17th September 2015. Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Southampton.
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