The use of Compression Therapy in the treatment of Venous Leg Ulcers: a recommended management pathway

Patient presents with a suspected venous leg ulcer → Assessment → Non-invasive diagnostics
- Ankle-brachial pressure index (ABPI)
- Confirmation of venous disease
- Investigations to exclude other disorders

Other → Venous ulcer → Arterial ulcer → Mixed arterial and venous ulcer
- Arterial insufficiency (ABPI 0.5-0.8)
- Severe arterial insufficiency (ABPI < 0.5)

Disease specific treatment
- Appropriate compression for oedema control based on ABPI

Arterial ulcer
- Reduced compression (15-25 mmHg)
- Referral to vascular specialist particularly if continuing rest pain

Mixed arterial and venous ulcer
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- Arterial insufficiency (ABPI 0.5-0.8)
- Severe arterial insufficiency (ABPI < 0.5)

Mixed arterial and venous ulcer
- Reduced compression
- Referral to vascular specialist
- No compression

Appropriate compression for oedema control based on ABPI

Compression
- Multi-layer (Elastic or inelastic)
- Reduced compression
- Stockings
- Intermittent Pneumatic Compression (IPC)

Medical and surgical treatment
- Appropriate dressing
- Education

Reasons for referral
- Allergy
- Unable to tolerate compression
- Uncontrolled pain
- No reduction in ulcer size in 1 month
- Ulcer duration greater than 6 months
- Cellulitis unresponsive to treatment
- Frequent recurrence

Active/mobile patient
- First line therapy
- Multi-layer compression (elastic or inelastic)
- Second line therapy
- Elastic stockings

Immobile/fixed ankle patient
- First line therapy
- Multi-layer compression (elastic)
- Second line therapy
- Multi-layer compression (elastic) + IPC

Appropriate dressing selection according to:
- Wound and surrounding skin characteristics
- Allergies
- Availability

Ulcer heals post treatment
- Prevention of recurrence including below the knee stocking
- Evaluation for surgical correction
- Education

Ulcer fails to heal
- Definition: no reduction in size in 1 month
- Refer to specialist
- Re-evaluation including diagnosis and re-assessment
- Evaluation for surgical correction or skin grafting

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