

# Preface

The production of this book represents the culmination of a working lifetime spent testing and evaluating surgical dressings and allied materials (with a few years off for maggot production).

When I first began working in the field in 1974 most of the materials then available consisted largely of cotton or viscose and were principally designed to absorb exudate or conceal the underlying wound in order to protect the delicate sensibilities of the patient and the public at large. Gradually, however, these simple materials were replaced by evermore sophisticated products which were claimed by the manufacturers concerned, not always entirely accurately, to represent a major advance on what had gone before. Some of these innovations have stood the test of time whilst others have fallen by the wayside to be replaced by the next generation of 'wonder dressings'.

During the last 35 years our understanding of the processes involved in wound healing at a biochemical and cellular level has advanced considerably, and some wound management materials are now available that have been designed specifically to influence these processes in some small way in order to facilitate healing.

This trend will undoubtedly continue, but what is less certain is that the products which result from this research will be produced at a price which will place them within the reach of most wound management practitioners or their patients. It is also by no means certain that these new developments, if and when they become available, will impact significantly on the management of hard-to-heal wounds such as those caused by circulatory disorders, diseases such as diabetes and cancer, or the pressure areas which will inevitably continue to plague some seriously ill patients.

It is likely, therefore, that the management of chronic wounds will continue to represent an increasing drain on financial and other resources for the foreseeable future and that the majority of problem wounds will continue to be dressed with variations of the types of dressings in current use.

If these materials are to be used in the most appropriate cost-effective manner it is essential that all those involved have a good understanding of the physical properties and key functions of the products concerned, combined with some knowledge of published evidence of their clinical effectiveness in normal use.

This book has been produced in an attempt to offer guidance in all these areas. It is important to note, however, that it does *not* attempt to provide the type of information commonly found in systematic reviews, most of which consume a considerable amount of time and money to produce, only to conclude that insufficient data is available upon which to make any useful recommendations that might influence clinical practice.

Rather it book sets out to describe the development, and where appropriate, the chemical and physical properties of the different dressing types. It then uses this information to provide the reader with some understanding of how these properties are likely to influence the clinical performance of the products concerned and attempts to

support these predictions by reference to published clinical data describing the use of each type of dressing in a variety of clinical indications.

The text is divided into chapters most of which deal with particular types or classes of dressings. The classification system used is of necessity very simple and some products have perhaps not been classified in a way that their manufacturers would have wished. In some instances pseudoscientific 'generic' descriptions of certain types of dressings that have more to do with marketing or reimbursement issues than helping users understand the structure or function of the products concerned have been ignored in favour of alternative descriptions which more closely reflect their true nature.

Portions of the content have been published previously in various forms although I have tried to improve and update all previously published work where appropriate.

Some of the products described herein have been discontinued or are no longer available in specific markets. The inclusion of these products was deliberate, as in many cases they provide a useful indication of the way in which dressings have evolved. Their inclusion also provides the reader with a single convenient source of reference on wound management products past and present. When reviewing published literature, or reading an account of a trial conducted some years previously, it is helpful to have an understanding of the properties of the products involved in order to form a judgement on the relevance or otherwise of the clinical outcomes.

Many dressings have changed ownership over the years and some have also changed their names. Efforts have been made to ensure that the information provided is correct at the time of publication but it is possible that some information is out of date for which I apologise.

To save repetition, time and space, the commonly used practice of identifying the manufacturer of individual dressings as they are cited in the text has been set aside. This information has been collected together in a separate section of the book which also acts as a buyers guide.

I have attempted to make the book as international as possible by including products from markets outside the UK, in particular the United States. This unfortunately means that some dressings may not be familiar to all readers, or not available for purchase in some areas, but once again the inclusion of products from different countries should make it easier for the reader when considering studies undertaken in a different geographical location.

A significant and deliberate omission from this book is a chapter on cultured cell systems and tissue replacements. This has not been included as it is a specialist area which does not fall within the remit of this publication.

It is by no means certain that this publication will run to a second edition but if any dressing manufacturer from the UK or elsewhere identifies any serious omissions in terms of products or key publications which they believe should be included in a future edition, should this ever be produced, I would be pleased to hear from them. Similarly information on any errors, factual or otherwise, or comments on the content will be equally welcomed. Finally I sincerely hope you enjoy reading and using this book as much as I enjoyed producing it.

S. T.