

## **The risks and consequences of pressure ulcers in people with spinal cord injury**



**Spinal Injuries Association's trusted partners Trethowans describe a tragic case of clinical negligence that led to a long-term, debilitating impact on a client's quality of life.**

**Tom Hartigan**

**Partner - Personal Injury**

**For and on behalf of Trethowans LLP**

“Mr M sustained a spinal cord injury 13 years ago. He had always taken very good care of his skin and had established a sensible routine of skin care.

“He was unfortunately taken to hospital with a severe nose-bleed (he took warfarin daily) and initially treated in A&E. Both the ambulance crew and A&E staff were informed that he was paraplegic and on warfarin. He was admitted to hospital and transferred to a ward later the same evening. Over the next few days, he did not receive any assistance with the management of his paraplegia. He was only provided with an inflatable mattress, which at one stage completely deflated during the night, rather than any specialist pressure-relieving mattress. He was also not turned regularly during the day or night, which was a key part of his skin care regime at home. As a result of this neglect over a period of several days, he developed severe pressure ulcers around his coccyx, buttocks and the top of his legs.

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“Medical evidence obtained from a consultant in rehabilitation medicine confirmed that Mr M and his wife had developed a very effective regime of skin care and management since his spinal cord injury. This had ensured his skin was in good condition despite the obvious risks of pressure ulcers and infection given his paraplegia. Sadly, all of this good work and care over many years was effectively destroyed by the failure of the hospital staff to manage his needs appropriately whilst in hospital. This led to irreversible breakdown of the skin and development of severe pressure ulcers. Mr M was left at a greatly increased risk of suffering further skin breakdown and pressure ulcers in the future. He also required significant additional care.

“It is terribly sad that in this day and age simple care and assistance is not always made available for spinal cord injured people in hospitals. The risk of developing pressure ulcers is a well-known one and has been for some considerable time, and the need for a skin bundle (to plan and implement all of the factors involved in maintaining skin integrity when planning care for a patient) is widely accepted, but often not implemented. The consequences of a skin breakdown can be significant and irreversible, as the individual is likely to be left prone to further breakdown and infection in the future. Trethowans are delighted to join and support SIA’s very important campaign to highlight and raise awareness of the risk of pressure sores.”

### **Preventing pressure ulcers:**

If you develop a pressure ulcer and you have concerns about its treatment – or if it seems to be getting worse – contact [SCINurseSpecialists@spinal.co.uk](mailto:SCINurseSpecialists@spinal.co.uk) for a referral to our SCI Nurse Specialist with a focus on skin care and tissue viability. We can work with your District Nurses or Tissue Viability team to ensure safe and appropriate care and reduce the risk of a recurrence.

- For advice on how to prevent pressure ulcers, see the [SIA ‘Stop & Act’ resource](#) and fact sheet on [‘pressure ulcers – the basics’](#).
- Get in touch with SIA’s Support Line on 0800 980 0501.
- Contact the [SIA Academy](#) for more details on our new ‘Skin Care Study Day’ titled Preventing Skin Compromise in SCI Skin.