

# Suspend stocking treatment and save £7m, researchers say

Traditional use of compression legwear to prevent deep vein thrombosis 'makes no significant difference' to stroke patients

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MILLIONS of pounds could be saved after Scottish researchers revealed surgical stockings, used to treat NHS stroke patients, are of no benefit.

It is currently standard practice for patients to wear tight stockings to increase blood flow through the legs and reduce the risk of clots.

But a study at Edinburgh University has now found that the compression stockings have no effect in preventing deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

The experts estimate that cutting use of the stockings in stroke units could save the NHS across the UK around £7 million and 320,000 hours of nursing time each year.

The risk of DVT is increased when patients have limited movement and, as a result, those confined to bed or passengers on long-distance flights are recommended to use them. Around two-thirds of stroke patients are unable to walk when admitted to hospital, and around 15 per cent develop blood clots because of limited mobility.

For this reason guidelines have also suggested they too should wear stockings to reduce the risk of clots.

The latest study examined more than 2,500 stroke patients in the UK, Italy and Australia.

All the patients received normal care for a stroke but half were offered surgical stockings and the other half were not.

The researchers found that, 30 days after their stroke, there was no significant difference be-

tween the two groups.

DVT occurred in 10 per cent of patients in the stockings group and in 10.5 per cent of patients in the routine care only group.

However, the patients using the stockings suffered more skin breaks, ulcers and blisters than the group which did not wear them - 5 per cent to 1 per cent.

The research, published in *The Lancet*, was presented yesterday at the European Stroke Congress in Stockholm.

In the UK, stroke patients were recruited from the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and St John's Hospital in Livingston.

Stroke units in the Lothian region treat an estimated 1,200 stroke patients a year and 3,200 nursing hours are spent checking and changing stockings.

The researchers now believe this time could be better spent providing other aspects of care for patients, and NHS Lothian no longer uses the stockings.

Professor Martin Dennis, from Edinburgh University, lead clinician for the managed clinical network for stroke in Lothian, said: "Abandoning this ineffective and sometimes uncomfortable treatment will free up valuable resources in our health services."

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## TAKING STOCK

LEN Warmer suffered a stroke in October last year and was admitted to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. He was later transferred to the Western General and was asked to take part in the stockings study.

Mr Warmer, 59, was placed in the group of stroke patients who did not have to wear stockings as they recovered. He said he had leg scans to look for signs of DVT and none was found.

"After my stroke, I was wheelchair-bound and had difficulties on my left side," Mr Warmer said. "Now I can walk, but not without pain."

"Everything is a bit more difficult, but I am fairly well off, compared to some patients."

He said it was important that patients took part in studies to help others.

David Clark, the chief executive of Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland, said: "More than 150,000 people a year have a stroke in the UK."

"This important research shows conclusively that compression stockings do not prevent DVT for stroke patients and can often have unpleasant side-effects."

"More research like this, which will make a practical and positive impact on the lives of stroke patients, is needed."





After years of dispensing surgical stockings, the end is nigh

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