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Challenges and Gaps in Diabetic Foot Care: A Qualitative Study of Primary Care Providers in Kuantan

NURUL HUSNA AZMI^{1*}, NUR FIZA IZRIN MOHD SA'IM¹,
AZWANIS ABDUL HADI¹, MOHD AZNAN MD ARIS¹, AMINUDIN CHE
AHMAD², SITI MARIAM MUDA³

¹*Department of Family Medicine, Kuliyah of Medicine, International Islamic University Malaysia, 25200 Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia*

²*Department of Orthopaedic, Kuliyah of Medicine, International Islamic University Malaysia, 25200 Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia*

³*Kuliyah of Nursing, International Islamic University Malaysia, 25200 Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia*

**Corresponding author: husnaabdullah@iiu.edu.my*

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Diabetic foot problem (DFP) represents a major burden in Malaysia, contributing to morbidity, hospital admissions, and lower limb amputations. Primary care providers are often the first point of contact, yet their role in managing DFPs is underexplored. In Malaysia, we are in progress of setting up foot care protection service in primary care. This study investigates the experiences of healthcare providers in Kuantan's primary health clinics, focusing on clinical challenges, systemic barriers, and continuity of care to fill up the gap in providing the best foot care service in Malaysia.

Materials and methods: A qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured focus group discussions with 12 primary care providers (medical officers, diabetic nurses, and Family Medicine Specialist) from four health clinics in Kuantan. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling. All discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. **Results:** Providers reported difficulties in wound care management, limited resources, and delayed referrals. Systemic barriers included staff shortage, high patient load, inadequate screening tools and educational material, and fragmented referral pathways. Communication gaps between primary and tertiary care disrupted continuity and follow-up. **Conclusion:** Addressing resource constraints, improving referral systems, and enhancing inter-provider communication are critical to strengthening DFU care in Malaysian primary care clinics.

Keywords: Diabetic foot care; foot protection care services; Malaysia; primary care clinics; provider perspectives