LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Question:

Because the depth of a sternal wound after debridement is usually down to the heart, what are the best parameters and approach to use when measuring the depth of a sternal wound?

From Ellen Shraff, RN, CWS, FACCWS

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Answer: Wound care providers are encountering an increasing number of sternal wound infections. These occur after open heart surgery and can involve the soft tissue of the wound or may involve deeper layers, including the sternal bone and cartilage. The osteomyelitic bone may be necrotic and may require an aggressive surgical debridement, which may result in large defect with heart exposure. In patients who, because of their medical and nutritional conditions, are not good candidates for a pectoralis major flap closure, or for those who elect to go with the conservative approach, long-

term negative pressure wound therapy is indicated. As part of wound assessment, regular wound measurements with photography are the standard of care.

When one is measuring a sternal wound, the 2-dimensional linear measurements follow the well-established rules and take into consideration the position of the wound on the body. North-south, or vertical, measurement indicates the length of the wound. The east-west axis indicates the width of the wound. However, for the depth of the wound, especially when looking at a beating heart, the depth should be established by measuring the deepest point of the inferior edge of the remaining bony sternum up to the highest point on the wound edge.

I would like to thank Mrs. Shraff for this interesting question.

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