International Wound Infection Institute

Glossary of Consensus Definitions

Antimicrobial resistance	Antimicrobial resistance occurs when microorganisms change over time in ways that render the medications used to treat the infections they cause ineffective.
Antimicrobial tolerance	Antimicrobial tolerance occurs when microorganisms have a lower susceptibility to an antimicrobial.
Antiseptic	An antiseptic is a topical agent with broad spectrum activity that inhibits multiplication of, or sometimes kills, microorganisms. Depending upon its concentration, an antiseptic may have a toxic effect on human cells. Development of resistance to topical antiseptics is uncommon.
Biofilm	Biofilms are aggregates of microorganisms that have unique characteristics and enhanced tolerance to treatment and the host defences. Wound biofilms are associated with impaired wound healing and signs and symptoms of chronic inflammation.
Colonisation	Colonisation refers to the presence of microorganisms within the wound that are undergoing limited proliferation. No significant host reaction is evoked and no delay in wound healing clinically observed.
Contamination	Contamination refers to the presence within the wound of microorganisms that are not proliferating. No significant host reaction is evoked and no delay in wound healing clinically observed.
Exudate	Exudate refers to fluid that is released from tissue and/or capillaries in response to injury, inflammation and/or microbial burden. It is mainly comprised of serum, fibrin, proteins and white blood cells
Fibrinous wound base/surface	A fibrinous wound base/surface is a metabolic by-product of healing occurring as a layer that is loosely or firmly adherent to the wound bed. It is composed of serum and matrix proteins that may be white, yellow, tan, brown or green, and has a fibrous or gelatinous texture and appearance.
Friable tissue	Friable tissue is fragile tissue that bleeds easily.
Hypergranulation	Hypergranulation is an increase in the proliferation of granulation tissue such that the tissue progresses above or over the wound edge and inhibits epithelialisation. It presents as raised, soft/spongy, shiny, friable, red tissue.
Local infection	Local infection refers to the presence and proliferation of microorganisms within the wound that evoke a response from the host that often includes delayed wound healing. Local infection is contained within the wound and the immediate periwound region (less than 2cm). Local infection often presents as subtle (covert) signs that may develop into the classic (overt) signs of infection.
Maceration	Maceration refers to wrinkled, soggy and/or soft peri-wound skin occurring due to exposure to moisture. Macerated peri-wound skin usually presents as white/pale and is at increased risk of breakdown.
Microbial burden	Microbial burden is the number of microorganisms in a wound, the pathogenicity of which is influenced by the microorganisms present (i.e., the species/strain), their growth and their potential virulence mechanisms.
Pocketing	Pocketing occurs when granulation tissue does not grow in a uniform manner across the entire wound base, leading to a dead space that can potentially harbor microorganisms.
Slough	Slough is nonviable tissue of varying colour (e.g., cream, yellow, greyish or tan) that may be loose or firmly attached, slimy, stringy, or fibrinous.
Surfactant	A wound cleansing surfactant is a hydrophobic/lipophilic agent that reduces the surface tension between liquid and debris, slough and/or biofilm in a wound. The reduction in surface tension better disperses the liquid, improving the cleansing effect.
Systemic infection	Systemic infection arising from a wound refers to microorganisms spreading throughout the body via the vascular or lymphatic systems, evoking a host response that affects the body as a whole. Signs of systemic infection include a systemic inflammatory response, sepsis and organ dysfunction.
Wound cleansing	Wound cleansing is actively removing surface contaminants, loose debris, non-attached non-viable tissue, microorganisms and/or remnants of previous dressings from the wound surface and its surrounding skin.