LYMPHEDEMA
IN PALLIATIVE CARE

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OBJECTIVES

- Lymphedema Education Benchmark Statements
- Interprofessional roles in best practice
- Research update on effective treatment
- Advanced cancer & edema at end of life
- Referrals & resources
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BENCHMARK 1: LYMPH SYSTEM ANATOMY & PHYSIOLOGY
BENCHMARK 2: PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF LYMPHEDEMA

RISK FACTORS FOR LYMPHEDEMA:

• Cancer
  • Surgical resection
  • Radiation
  • Tumor compression

• Venous insufficiency

• Obesity

• Immobility

• High exposure to mosquito bites

Planas-Paz and Lemmert 2013
BENCHMARK 3: OTHER CAUSES OF EDEMA

• Cellulitis

• Deep vein thrombosis

• Other vascular disorders

• Systemic disorders, e.g. cardiac, liver or renal
BENCHMARK 3: EDEMA IN END OF LIFE

• Advanced Cancer
  • Metastases
  • Drugs
  • Hypoalbuminaemia
  • Ascites

• System Failure
  • Chronic heart failure
  • End stage renal disease
  • End stage chronic respiratory disease
  • Advanced liver disease
  • Advanced neurological disease
Table 1. Stages of Lymphedema

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Subclinical or pre-lymphedema. Typically includes all patients who have had lymph node dissection. Swelling is not evident, although impaired lymph flow is present. The stage may last for a long time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Accumulation of fluid and protein in tissue is present. Elevation may influence the limb; pitting may be present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Includes swelling that does not reduce with elevation; pitting is present with fibrosis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Fibrotic tissue has indiscernible pitting; includes skin thickening and large limb volume known as elephantiasis, a morbid condition where lymphstasis and chronic inflammation develop into fibrosclerosis and additional tissue swelling (Foldi, 1998).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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BENCHMARK 5: PATIENT EDUCATION

• Use BC Cancer handout

• With damaged lymph nodes, always at risk

• No cure, only self-management

• Early detection is key

• Treatment available
BENCHMARK 6: LYMPHEDEMA MANAGEMENT

• Complex Decongestive Therapy (CDT)

• Two phases:
  • Intensive
  • Maintenance
MANUAL LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE

MLD

Exercise  
Self care education  
Compression bandaging  
Skin care  
Infection Prevention

Lymphedema: Diagnosis and Therapy, 4th edition.
COMPRESSION
SKIN CARE

MLD

Exercise

Self care education

Compression bandaging

Skin care
Infection Prevention
EXERCISE
SURGERY

- Surgical Reduction
- Bypass lymphatic obstruction
- Liposuction
- VGH developing a surgical program
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ADVANCED CANCER & END OF LIFE

- Multifactorial edema
- Patient directs priorities
- Focus on quality of life
- Refer to Allied Health
END OF LIFE ALGORITHM

• What region of the body?
  • Head & Neck
  • Genital
  • Widespread

• Venous compression from a tumor?
• Cellulitis?
• Fungating wound?
• Paralysis?
SUBCUTANEOUS LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE

• Severe refractory lymphedema due to obstructive cancer
  • Genitalia, lower abdomen, legs
  • Pitting edema, no fibrosis

• #17 Gauge dialysis catheter(s)
• Urinary leg drainage bag
• Monitor for fever and hypotension

• VGH PCU and BC Cancer can perform

Jacobsen & Blinderman (2011)
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ONLINE: PROVIDER

- [www.bccancer.bc.ca](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca)
  Search “lymphedema”

- Patient handout

- Symptom Management Guideline #9
ONLINE: PROVIDER

• www.lympho.org

• Position documents

• Lymphedema in Advanced Cancer & Edema at End of Life
ONLINE: PATIENT

Canadalymph.ca

BClymph.org

Cancer.ca

CancerConnection.ca
REFERRALS

• Public
  • Cancer Center
  • Hospital Outpatient Department
  • Home Care

• Private Practice
  • Physical Therapy
  • Massage Therapy
REFERRALS: HOSPITALS IN BC

- St. Paul’s Hospital
- Royal Jubilee Hospital
- Surrey Memorial Hospital
- Abbotsford Regional Hospital
CONCLUSION

• Lymphedema significantly affects function and quality of life

• Consider the lymph system when assessing edema

• Management algorithms are available online

• Educate patients on
  • Monitoring for signs & symptoms
  • Self management

• Refer to your Allied Health colleagues
REFERENCES

- Lymphoedema Education Benchmark Statements https://www.lympho.org/lebs/
- Introduction to the Lymphatic System, National Cancer Institute https://training.seer.cancer.gov/anatomy/lymphatic/