

# Physiotherapy in Lymphoedema

**Anna Pyszora, PT, PhD**

**Chair and Department of Palliative Care,  
Collegium Medicum UMK, Poland**

## **A definition of rehabilitation**

The purpose of rehabilitation is to improve the quality of survival, so that patients' life will be as comfortable and productive as possible and he/she can function at a minimum level of dependency.

## **Aims of Physiotherapy:**

- optimize the patient's level of physical function,
- improve quality of life.
- part of symptomatic treatment in PC (pain, constipation, lymphoedema, cancer related fatigue, breathlessness).

## **Lymphoedema**

Lymphoedema is swelling that develops because of a build-up of fluid in the body's tissues.

This happens when the lymphatic system, which normally drains the fluid away, isn't working properly.

It can occur in many part of the body, but is most likely to affect an arm or a leg.

## **Causes of lymphoedema**

Cancer –related lymphoedema is caused by cancer treatments or the cancer itself:

- surgery to remove lymph nodes can interrupt the normal flow of the lymphatic system, leading to a build-up of fluid in the affected area,

## **Causes of lymphoedema**

- radiotherapy to the lymph nodes can cause scar tissue that block the flow of lymph,
- cancer cells that spread to the lymph nodes can cause a blockage, leading to a build-up of fluid,
- pressing of the tumor on the lymph vessels and nodes can cause a blockage in lymphatic tracts.

## **Most common places of lymphoedema**

- In the arm after breast cancer treatment (surgery and/or radiotherapy) to the armpit,
- In the leg if cancer or its treatment affects the lymph nodes in the pelvis or groin area (surgery and/or radiotherapy of the lymph nodes in the pelvis for gynaecological or anal cancers).

## **Physiotherapy in lymphoedema**

- Manual lymphatic drainage (MLD)
- *Multilayer compression bandaging*
- Compression garments
- Exercise programs
- Education

## **Multi layer bandaging**

- Tubular bandage (protects skin),
- Bandaging the hand or foot,
- Orthopaedic wool (absorbs exudate,redistributes pressure around limb, protects skin),
- Short-stretch bandages (compression)