



### **Physiotherapy Services at the Calgary Lymphedema Rehabilitation Centre**

Calgary Lymphedema Rehabilitation and Consulting Services (CLRCS) officially opened its doors in October 2003. CLRCS's vision is to provide premiere lymphedema management to our clients through evidence-based practice. Founder Byron Shier is a registered Occupational Therapist as well as a certified Lymphedema Therapist with previous work experience in a Lymphedema clinic in the United States. On returning to Calgary it became his passion to improve lymphedema services for patients in the Calgary region. The Calgary Lymphedema Rehabilitation Centre now boasts an interdisciplinary rehabilitation team specializing in assessing and treating lymphatic related disorders. We offer Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Massage Therapy and Surgical garment fitting to address lymphedema. As a physiotherapist I have been working with breast cancer patients and lymphedema since 1989. Lymphedema care has improved tremendously and should be an integral part of all breast cancer patients' rehabilitation.

Breast cancer patients do make up the majority of our clientele. Referrals typically come from the Tom Baker Cancer Centre in Calgary and community Physicians. Clients are assessed and if treatment is required a Doctor's referral is requested. The clinic is private without funding from the Calgary Health Region.

The initial visit for breast cancer patients typically lasts 1-1 1/2 hours. A thorough history is taken and physical assessment, including circumferential and fibrosis measures, ROM of the affected shoulder, strength, skin integrity, radiation changes, pain and discomfort levels as well as functional limitations that the person may be experiencing. Depending on the needs of the person, the inter-disciplinary team approach is used to problem solve and treat that individual. An integral part of that initial visit is education. Clients are provided with education on lymphedema, including physiology, staging, prevention and of course treatment options. Treatment options are fully reviewed and a plan is formulated to best suit that individual.

Mild to moderate lymphedemas typically attend 3-5 sessions for Manual Lymph Drainage and Compression Bandaging. Visits are usually one hour in length and will also cover further prevention education; exercise and self massage instruction. Bilateral mastectomies or severe lymphedemas often require a longer course of treatment. As lymphedema is a chronic condition a large responsibility is put onto the patient to learn methods of self-management. A self-management plan includes educating patients and family on self-bandaging, exercise, self-massage and activity modification. Consistent use of daytime garments and nighttime compression wrapping to manage their

lymphedema is essential. Custom nighttime sleeves such as the Reid, Circaid or Power sleeves for individuals who are unable to bandage are also available through the clinic.

Once the circumferential measures plateau, compression garments are fitted either in-house or through community vendors. Our fitter is invaluable given her extensive experience.

Follow-ups are scheduled usually 2 weeks post fitting and then typically every 6 months for re-assessment. Breast cancer patients come to our door at all stages of their disease and our treatments reflect their changing needs. Aggressive manual lymph drainage and bandaging may ultimately turn to more palliative measures to assist with pain and volume control. Breast cancer patients are very special clientele. We learn many of life's lessons through their experiences and in turn live fuller lives ourselves. CLRCS strives to improve the quality of life of all those we see at our clinic.

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