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Manual Lymph Drainage: A Beneficial Therapy for Oncology Patients

Cancer and its treatments can pose numerous challenges for patients, and one common issue is lymphedema. Manual lymph drainage (MLD) is a specialized massage technique that has shown promising results in managing lymphedema and relieving oncology patients. This article explores the benefits of MLD for individuals undergoing cancer treatment and highlights its role in improving their quality of life.

Understanding Lymphedema

Lymphedema is characterized by the accumulation of excess lymphatic fluid in the tissues, resulting in swelling, discomfort, and compromised immune function. It often

occurs due to cancer treatments, such as surgery or radiation therapy, which can damage or remove lymph nodes, impeding the natural flow of lymphatic fluid. This disruption can lead to fluid buildup in the affected areas, causing pain and mobility issues.

The Role of Manual Lymph Drainage

MLD is a gentle and non-invasive therapy that stimulates the lymphatic system and promotes the flow of lymphatic fluid throughout the body. Specifically tailored to each patient's needs, MLD utilizes light, rhythmic movements, and specific hand techniques to encourage the drainage of lymphatic fluid from congested areas to healthy lymph nodes. This facilitates efficient fluid elimination and reduces swelling, significantly benefiting oncology patients.

Benefits of MLD for Oncology Patients

- 1. Lymphedema Management:** MLD is highly effective in managing lymphedema. By stimulating lymphatic flow, MLD helps to reduce swelling, improve tissue elasticity, and enhance the transport capacity of lymphatic vessels. It can also aid in preventing the progression of lymphedema and reduce the frequency and severity of associated flare-ups.
- 2. Pain Relief:** Cancer treatments and lymphedema can cause significant discomfort and pain for patients. MLD's gentle massage techniques promote relaxation, relieve muscle tension, and enhance circulation. This can result in reduced pain, improved range of motion, and overall well-being.
- 3. Immune System Support:** Cancer treatment often weakens the immune system, leaving patients at a higher risk of infections. MLD helps to boost immune function by facilitating the movement of immune cells and antibodies through the lymphatic system. By improving lymphatic flow and enhancing the body's natural defense mechanisms, MLD supports the immune system's ability to fight infections and promote healing.

4. Scar Tissue Management: Surgeries associated with cancer treatment can leave behind scar tissue, impeding lymphatic flow. MLD techniques are beneficial in softening and mobilizing scar tissue, reducing adhesions, and promoting better lymphatic circulation. By addressing scar tissue, MLD minimizes the risk of lymphedema development and improves overall tissue health.

5. Emotional and Psychological Support: Dealing with cancer and its treatments can affect a patient's emotional well-being. MLD offers a nurturing and calming experience that can help reduce anxiety, stress, and depression.

Conclusion

Manual lymph drainage has emerged as a valuable therapy for oncology patients, offering a range of benefits, including lymphedema management, pain relief, immune system support, scar tissue management, and emotional well-being. MLD provides a holistic approach to alleviating the physical and emotional challenges faced by individuals undergoing cancer treatment. Patients must consult with their healthcare team to determine the appropriateness of MLD in their specific case and to seek the expertise of trained therapists experienced in working with oncology patients.



ONCOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS FOR MANUAL LYMPH DRAINAGE - AN ADVANCED MLD COURSE

In this course, students will learn how to perform manual lymphatic drainage to safely work with people with cancer and with a history of oncology treatments. This course is

delivered in a hybrid format, with 2 in-person days of hands-on practice and is open to manual lymph drainage and lymphedema certified therapists.

Course Objective

This course will focus on safe ways to use manual lymphatic drainage when working on patients with cancer and histories of cancer treatments. Students will learn about oncology including epidemiology, metastasis and cancer treatments. Contraindications and bodywork considerations will be addressed as therapists explore protocols for common side effects of cancer and its treatments such as Lymphedema and Axillary Web Syndrome.

Class Topics:

- Introduction to cancer types
- How cancer manifests in the body
- Metastasis
- Oncological treatments
- Side effects to common treatments
- Bodywork adjustments related to oncology work
- Contraindications and precautions
- Review of the lymphatic system
- Lymphedema, breast and prostate oncology, Axillary Web Syndrome
- Manual lymphatic drainage protocols
- Administrative considerations including documentation and scope of practice

Course Format:

This 28-hour course is delivered in a hybrid format including home study, live webinar and in-person class time. Students will complete 4 hours of home study followed by the two 4-hour live webinar components. Therapists will then be able to join any scheduled 2-day in-person class for the hands-on portion of the course.

Prerequisites:

This course is open to manual lymph drainage certified therapists, (certified through ACOLS or equivalent) and certified lymphedema therapists.

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