



POSITION STATEMENT

TREATING LYMPHEDEMA

THE RMTAO BOARD OF DIRECTORS ADOPTED THE FOLLOWING POSITION STATEMENT IN JUNE 2008 WITH RESPECT TO THE TREATMENT OF LYMPHEDEMA:

THE TREATMENT OF LYMPHEDEMA REQUIRES THAT THE THERAPIST HAVE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS SPECIFIC TO THE COMPLEXITIES OF THIS CONDITION.

IN ORDER TO HAVE ADEQUATE THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE PRACTICAL SKILLS TO SAFELY AND EFFECTIVELY TREAT INDIVIDUALS WITH LYMPHEDEMA, IT IS THE POSITION OF THE REGISTERED MASSAGE THERAPISTS' ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO THAT THE MINIMUM EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS IN COMPLETE DECONGESTIVE THERAPY BE AS FOLLOWS:

- *THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF 135 HOURS OF EDUCATION IN COMPLETE DECONGESTIVE THERAPY (CDT); AND*
- *THE COURSEWORK BE FROM ONE LYMPHEDEMA TRAINING PROGRAM CONSISTING OF 1/3 THEORETICAL INSTRUCTION AND 2/3 PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION DIRECTLY AIMED AT THE TREATMENT OF LYMPHEDEMA.*

BACKGROUND

SEVERAL LYMPHEDEMA ASSOCIATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA HAVE SUGGESTED THERAPISTS INTERESTED IN FOCUSING THEIR PRACTICES TO THE TREATMENT OF LYMPHEDEMA BE REQUIRED TO OBTAIN ADDITIONAL EDUCATION.

LYMPHEDEMA IS A CHRONIC CONDITION CHARACTERIZED BY THE ABNORMAL ACCUMULATION OF FLUID AS A RESULT OF AN INSUFFICIENT LYMPHATIC SYSTEM (NATIONAL LYMPHEDEMA NETWORK, 2005). THIS INSUFFICIENCY MAY BE CAUSED BY PRIMARY MALFORMATION OF LYMPHATIC VESSELS AND NODES OR DUE TO SECONDARY CAUSES, SUCH AS A LYMPHECTOMY AS A RESULT OF CANCER. DUE IN PART TO THE NATURE AND CAUSE OF LYMPHEDEMA, THIS CONDITION IS OFTEN ACCOMPANIED BY COMPLICATING FACTORS SUCH AS CHANGES IN THE SKIN, RECURRENT TISSUE INFECTION AND NON-HEALING WOUNDS. THE IMPACT OF THIS CONDITION UPON THE INDIVIDUAL EXTENDS BEYOND THE PHYSICAL DOMAIN AND INTO THE FUNCTIONAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL REALMS AS WELL. THE NEED FOR COMPETENT PHYSICAL CARE THAT IS DELIVERED WITHIN A HOLISTIC FRAMEWORK IS GREAT.

ACCORDING TO A REPORT FROM THE LYMPHOVENOUS ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO (2006), ONE BARRIER FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH LYMPHEDEMA WITH REGARDS TO ACCESSING CARE IS THE SHORTAGE OF ADEQUATELY TRAINED PRACTITIONERS. IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THAT MASSAGE THERAPISTS MAY HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK WITH THIS POPULATION BUT OFTEN LACK THE NECESSARY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS SPECIFIC TO THE TREATMENT OF LYMPHEDEMA. IT IS REASONABLE TO BELIEVE THAT, WITH THE PROPER POST-DIPLOMA EDUCATION, MASSAGE THERAPISTS WOULD BE EFFECTIVE LYMPHEDEMA THERAPISTS.

COMPLETE DECONGESTIVE THERAPY, PRACTICED BY THOSE SPECIALIZING IN LYMPHEDEMA TREATMENT, CONSISTS OF MANUAL LYMPH DRAINAGE, BANDAGING, COMPRESSION GARMENTS/DEVICES, EXERCISE, DIET/NUTRITION AND SKIN CARE (LYMPHOVENOUS ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO, 2008). ALTHOUGH A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH EVIDENCE IS BEYOND THE SCOPE OF THIS POSITION STATEMENT, PRELIMINARY REVIEW INDICATES THAT COMPLETE DECONGESTIVE THERAPY HAS DEMONSTRATED MUCH SUCCESS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH LYMPHEDEMA. WHILE SOME OF THE COMPONENTS CDT ARE PART OF STANDARD MASSAGE THERAPY EDUCATION, OTHERS ARE NOT. AS A RESULT, IN ORDER TO PROVIDE COMPLETE CARE, POST-DIPLOMA EDUCATION IS REQUIRED.

THE ABOVE SUGGESTED CRITERIA ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE STANDARDS AGREED UPON BY THE NATIONAL LYMPHEDEMA NETWORK AND THE LYMPHOLOGY ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA (NATIONAL LYMPHEDEMA NETWORK, 2005).

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PROFESSION?

THE COLLEGE OF MASSAGE THERAPISTS OF ONTARIO SETS ENTRY TO PRACTICE STANDARDS FOR THE PROFESSION OF MASSAGE THERAPY AS WELL AS DEFINING THE COMPETENCIES OF THE PROFESSION. THE REGISTERED MASSAGE THERAPISTS' ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO, AS A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION, IDENTIFIES BEST PRACTICES THAT IT RECOMMENDS BE ADOPTED BY THE PROFESSION IN ORDER TO ENSURE THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE QUALITY OF CARE FOR PATIENTS OF MASSAGE THERAPISTS.

THIS POSITION STATEMENT IS A BEST-PRACTICE RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE TREATMENT OF LYMPHEDEMA.

REFERENCES

LYMPHOVENOUS ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO. (2008). *LYMPHOVENOUS NEWS*. TORONTO, ON: IN HOUSE.

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NATIONAL LYMPHEDEMA NETWORK. (2005). *POSITION STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL LYMPHEDEMA NETWORK: TRAINING OF LYMPHEDEMA THERAPISTS*. OAKLAND, CA: IN HOUSE.

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