Diagnosis and Treatment of Lymphedema in Patients With Breast Cancer: An Overview of an Interdisciplinary and Patient-Centered Approach

Lauren McCaulley, MSN, RN, CNP, OCN®, and Jennifer Smith, MSN, RN, CNP

Lymphedema is a distressing consequence of breast cancer treatment affecting the patient in all domains of quality of life. Early identification and diagnosis are key to preventing long-term consequences. The goal of lymphedema management is to slow the progression and provide symptomatic relief to maintain quality of life. Preoperative education, intensive postoperative follow-up, and long-term survivorship care are important to minimize risk factors for developing lymphedema and to provide a mechanism for early detection, treatment, and patient self-care. An interdisciplinary approach, including nutritionists, physical therapists, psychologists, and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), is essential to provide a patient-centered approach to the management of lymphedema. APRNs are critical in providing comprehensive assessments, ongoing follow-up care, and patient education in self-care strategies.

Lauren McCaulley, MSN, RN, CNP, OCN®, is a nurse practitioner in the Surgical Oncology department at the University Hospitals Seidman Cancer Center and Jennifer Smith, MSN, RN, CNP, is a survivorship nurse practitioner at Louis B. Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center, both in Cleveland, OH. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the article. The authors did not receive honoraria for this work. The content of this article has been reviewed by independent peer reviewers to ensure that it is balanced, objective, and free from commercial bias. No financial relationships relevant to the content of this article have been disclosed by the authors, planners, independent peer reviewers, or editorial staff. McCaulley can be reached at lauren.mccaulley@uhhospitals.org, with copy to editor at CJONEditor@ons.org. (Submitted June 2013. Revision submitted November 2013. Accepted for publication November 4, 2013.)

Key words: lymphedema; interdisciplinary; patient-centered; quality of life

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/14.CJON.E97-E102

The full text of this article can be accessed at http://ons.metapress.com.