Early detection of breast cancer-related lymphoedema*

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Position

The Australasian Lymphology Association (ALA) endorses the need for all patients treated for breast cancer to have access to:

1) an educational program informing them about lymphoedema

2) a prospective monitoring program for changes indicative of developing swelling, particularly for those at higher risk of developing breast cancer-related lymphoedema

Early detection of changes indicative of developing lymphoedema, and immediate conservative treatment, may reduce the long-term physical and functional impacts caused by progression and establishment of the condition.

All patients treated for breast cancer should undergo preoperative measurements of their arm, as well as receive education on lymphoedema, its risk factors, early signs of its development and a point of contact for clinical assessment if needed. For those who are at higher risk of developing lymphoedema, monitoring should begin postoperatively and continue at regular intervals for at least two years.

ALA Recommendations

Based on currently available evidence at this time, the ALA recommends:

- All patients be preoperatively assessed using circumference (volume) measurements and/or bioimpedance spectroscopy.
  - These measurements should be provided to the patient for ongoing monitoring where available/convenient.
- All patients should receive information about the possibility of developing lymphoedema, as well as information about the early signs and symptoms and the known risk factors.
- Patients who are deemed to be at high risk for the development of breast cancer-related lymphoedema should be monitored more regularly during the first year, and then at regular intervals for one more year.
- Patients who are deemed to be at lower risk for the development of breast cancer-related lymphoedema should be provided with information about who to contact if they have concerns about lymphoedema.

*Based on the ALA Position Paper of the same name