



promoting healthy & hopeful living with lymphedema

February 9, 2010

We, the BC Lymphedema Association, are writing to request that your local government proclaim **March 6th, 2010 Lymphedema Awareness Day**. This proclamation will raise awareness and understanding of lymphedema, thereby bringing hope and support to those in this community who suffer from this devastating condition. This proclamation will contribute to a worthwhile cause and benefit the community as a whole.

One of our main goals is to promote healthy and hopeful living with lymphedema. Our association needs your help in getting our message out in your community, so we are appealing to you to join many others throughout Canada in proclaiming March 6th Lymphedema Awareness Day.

Most people are not aware that 20–40% of breast cancer survivors (potentially 8,800 in Canada this year) will develop secondary lymphedema. Prostate and gynaecological cancer survivors are also at risk, as are heart, knee and hip surgery patients, as well as those who are injured by burns or severe wounds. It can even affect children, where an individual is born with a malfunctioning lymphatic system (primary lymphedema).

Lymphedema presents as swollen limbs and/or body parts, at times so pronounced that it is extremely disfiguring. It can occur in the upper or lower extremities and can lead to severe infections and loss of limb mobility. It occurs when the lymphatic system is compromised, so fluids carried throughout the body to meet the needs of various organs (e.g., protein to the heart), are blocked and begin to accumulate in body tissues. Cancer treatment is a frequent cause because surgery removes and radiation destroys the lymph nodes. Their function is to act as the “pumps” of the lymphatic system.

Lymphedema is little understood by patients and even by many in the medical community, often leading to problems with diagnosis and treatment, and leaving the afflicted unable to understand their distressing symptoms and what can be done to alleviate them.

Lymphedema cannot be cured – it can only be managed – by bandaging, massage therapy by specialists trained in manual lymphatic drainage techniques, compression garments and specific exercises. Although these techniques only minimize symptoms, they enable sufferers to lead a more active and hopeful life. Unfortunately, treatment and garments are extremely expensive and often not available to lymphedema patients because they are not covered by private or provincial health plans.

It is very likely that people in your community suffer with lymphedema. The courage, hope and faith it takes to live with this disease is strengthened by recognition, support, and encouragement. Your action in proclaiming March 6th Lymphedema Awareness Day will foster understanding of the difficulties lymphedema sufferers endure, encourage community support, and demonstrate a sincere effort to bring hope to those afflicted.

Catherine DiCecca,
BCLA President