



Life, love and lymphoedema Let's get on with it A rural cancer patient experience



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Background: Rural Cancer Survivors often have limited access to medical follow up. With best practice management of lymphoedema strongly linked to early detection and intervention, this cohort of patients require the knowledge of lymphoedema, prevention strategies, local service availability and the self-efficacy to seek assistance. This qualitative research project seeks to explore the rural cancer patients' experience of living with lymphoedema.

Methods: Phenomenology was used to explore participants' life experiences learning of lymphoedema and living with lymphoedema. The participants were randomly selected from a small rural lymphoedema clinic, having attended in the last 12 months. Semi structured interviews were used to capture participant experiences of living with lymphoedema.

Findings: Eight semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim. Three broad themes emerged; Life, Love, and Lymphoedema. These participants reported living very full and active lives, well supported by family, friends and the community. Despite this, they felt support from the medical fraternity was inconsistent. Access to a publicly funded ongoing lymphoedema service for review was a welcome safety net, enabling them to confidently seek reassurance and treatment if required.

Conclusion: This study focuses on the experiences of rural cancer patients. The findings add to the rich growing body of qualitative research giving insight into the daily lives of cancer survivors. Mixed methodology research may assist in developing an assessment tool to include the more holistic social paradigm of healthcare; assisting in identifying those most at risk of lymphoedema distress following treatment for cancer. Further dissemination of evidence based information regarding lymphoedema is required for clinicians caring for those at risk of and with lymphoedema.

For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'

Clare is a Physiotherapist with 25 years of experience working in the Shoalhaven on the South Coast of NSW for ISLHD with a passion for evidence based practice. More recently when working in the field of lymphoedema management it became evident that the predominately quantitative research base was neglecting the lived experience for these people sparking her interest in qualitative methodology.



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