



Outback Breast Cancer Related Lymphoedema Interventions: do we get the same lymphoedema outcomes?



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Aim: The Lourdes Lymphoedema Service (LLS) provides limited assessment and treatment services to a large geographical area. As access to health services and health outcomes are generally poorer in rural and remote areas, a review of clients with or at risk of breast cancer related lymphoedema (BCRL) was completed to ascertain if distance from LLS, treatment program undertaken and service utilisation rates were associated with changes in affected arm volume (AV).

Method: A Medical record review of all clients with or at risk of BCRL attending the LLS between 1 June 2006 and 30 June 2009.

Results: Subjects with a diagnosis of lymphoedema experienced a reduction in affected AV over time ($p=0.0032$), subclinical subjects experienced no change in AV ($p=0.5462$) and treatment non-compliers experienced growth in AV ($p=0.0313$). There was no association between distance and treatment program undertaken ($p=0.831$). Evidence suggests a beneficial association between living 50+ km from LLS and lymphoedema outcomes, with greater reductions in AV and lower rates of lymphoedema diagnosis in this group ($RR=0.70$, $p=0.0377$). Clients living within 49 km of LLS accessed the service at shorter intervals than those living 50+ km away ($p=0.02$) but this was related to diagnosis rather than distance.

Conclusion: Analysis has shown positive but not optimal changes in AV in the LLS BCRL client group. Mean reductions in AV at LLS were not equal to those documented in the literature due to inability to provide optimal treatment programs. Contrary to expectation distance did not have a detrimental effect on BCRL outcomes but it should still be considered during service provision. The results of this study mandate a focus on the education and monitoring of subclinical lymphoedema clients to enable early identification and treatment of new lymphoedema cases and supply of additional treatment programs to those with established lymphoedema.

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Brenda Svensson is an occupational therapist working at Lourdes Hospital and Community Health Service in Dubbo. She has worked in lymphoedema since 1991 and has an interest in early identification and intervention for breast cancer related lymphoedema, health education and lymphoedema service provision in rural and remote health settings.



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