

RISK FACTOR IDENTIFICATION AS A KEY STRATEGY IN LYMPHEDEMA PREVENTION AND TREATMENT IN PATIENTS AFTER CANCER TREATMENT

Ana Poljićanin, Ivan Vlak, Ivan Lasić, Nera Cvitanić Bilandžić, Marta Pavlović, Ivana Klarić Kukuz, Jure Aljinović, Blaž Barun

¹ University Hospital Split, Croatia
e-mail: ana.poljicanin@gmail.com

Background

Lymphedema is characterized by the accumulation of lymphatic fluid in soft tissues, most commonly affecting the limbs. This condition can lead to serious complications such as infections, skin changes, and joint stiffness, while also contributing to psychological distress and increased healthcare costs due to the need for prolonged management. Although the exact incidence of treatment-related lymphedema among cancer survivors remains unclear, it is widely recognized as a potentially lifelong, chronic condition that significantly diminishes quality of life. Lymphedema can develop following treatment for any malignancy that involves lymph node dissection or radiation targeting lymphatic regions. Early identification of patients at increased risk is critical for effective prevention and timely intervention. Key contributing factors include the site and extent of radiation therapy, the extent of lymph node removal, and the presence of underlying comorbidities. Recognizing these risk factors can play a pivotal role in reducing the burden of lymphedema in cancer survivors.

Case report

We report the case of a 30-year-old woman admitted in October 2024 for evaluation of progressive bilateral leg swelling. The lymphedema likely resulted from thoracic duct damage caused by mediastinal radiotherapy for Hodgkin's lymphoma, which she underwent in 2017. Edema appeared about one-year post-treatment and was preceded by significant weight gain. The patient's comorbidities—including spondyloarthritis, vitamin D deficiency, and anemia—likely contributed to the development and progression of her lymphedema.

Conclusion

This case highlights the importance of comprehensive risk factor identification, including metabolic and autoimmune conditions, which may predispose patients to lymphedema. Early recognition and proactive management of these factors are essential for prevention and for improving long-term outcomes in cancer survivors.

Keywords: Lymphedema, Cancer, Survivors, Radiotherapy, Risk factors