ONS Guidelines™
for Cancer Treatment–Related Lymphedema

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PURPOSE: Lymphedema is a chronic condition that may result from cancer-related surgery. The incidence of lymphedema varies greatly; however, patients remain at risk for life and may experience decreased quality of life and functional capacity. Providing recommendations for an evidence-based guideline for care of cancer treatment–related lymphedema will help to improve outcomes for patients with this chronic condition.

METHODOLOGIC APPROACH: A panel of healthcare professionals with patient representation convened to develop a national clinical practice guideline on prospective surveillance, risk reduction, and conservative treatment of lymphedema. Systematic reviews of the literature were conducted and the GRADE (Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development, and Evaluation) methodology approach was used to assess the evidence.

FINDINGS: The panel made multiple recommendations for patients who are at risk for or experiencing lymphedema.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: Early diagnosis and treatment of lymphedema may mitigate symptoms. This evidence-based guideline supports patients, clinicians, and other healthcare professionals in clinical decision making.

KEYWORDS lymphedema; prospective surveillance; GRADE; guideline development; systematic review

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