

Canada's Lymphedema Magazine

Pathways

Empowering patients and professionals

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SPRING 2011

Patient-
centered
approach

Kathy Bates
Her toughest
role yet
Resilience
Skin care secrets

NOUVEAU...

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 Empowering patients and professionals

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The Dutch, patient-centered, approach improvement in quality of life is associated with self-management.



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Learning to cope with lymphedema Resilience is not what happens to you. It's how you react to, respond to, and recover from what happens to you. — Jeffrey Gabor

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Laughing lymphercise

And the French connection

By Rosemary Kelly

Laughing Lymphercise™ is a gentle exercise program originally designed for breast cancer patients/survivors, blending sprinklings of laughter with movements recommended by physiotherapists and Decongestive Lymphatic Therapy schools such as **Vodder**, **Casley-Smith** and **Földi**. The focus is on lymphedema (LE) awareness, prevention and management, as well as providing local LE resources for participants such as a list of MLD therapists, garment sleeve fitters, lymphedema support groups and financial aid information like the Assistive Devices Program (ADP) in Ontario.

Why laughter?

The lymph in our bodies is propelled towards the heart through muscular movement and deep breathing. In India, at the Institute of Applied Dermatology (a renowned lymphedema clinic), pranayama exercises (controlled breathing) are an integral part of treatment to stimulate lymphatic flow.



The same results can be achieved through laughter: located above the diaphragm is the thoracic duct, the largest lymphatic collecting site in the body. Research proves that diaphragmatic breathing creates a negative pressure within the thorax, pulling lymph into the duct and then propelling this lymphatic

fluid out into the body at a greater rate than the normal lymph flow. Deep belly laughter helps to move the diaphragm thus increasing the flow of lymph into the thoracic duct!

The uplifting benefits of laughter are well known, and I found that within the cancer support centre environment, people were attracted to a class that offered laughter in conjunction with gentle movement and music. Some women were not drawn to support groups per se, and Laughing Lymphercise can become an inadvertent support group with friendships developing over coffee and sometimes lunch after class.

I taught regular weekly Laughing Lymphercise classes mainly in Toronto, Kitchener and Cambridge through cancer support centres. I was also invited to various cancer support groups in cities like Guelph and Mount Forest where I would present workshops, and I also introduced the program at International Breast Cancer conferences and Lymphedema Conferences where I enjoyed a very happy teaming up with the LAD.

Meeting people from all over the world at conferences ended up taking me and the program to places like England and India; some of you may have read my article in the *Pathways* Summer 2014 issue.



Rosemary Kelly has been teaching cancer survivors about Lymphedema risk, prevention and management and the benefits of laughter and movement for over 15 years through classes, workshops, articles, online symposia and conferences in Canada, the USA, England, France and India. She is also the external advisor for the Indian charity Race to rein-in-cancer. Please visit her website www.rosemarykelly.ca

Last year I was invited to France, to train two women who wanted to become Laughing Lymphercise instructors. This was a very unusual circumstance, as normally trainings take a lot of planning, require more than just two people and are usually done in English. But I am a bilingual Montrealer, these women were already Laughter Yoga instructors, so they had a great knowledge base and classroom experience, and I thought it would be fun to say yes! I am very happy to report that the encounter was extremely positive, and **Pascale Poinot-Lesterle** and **Marie-Thérèse Latecoere-Donnadille** are wonderful teachers. (www.yogaduire65.com)

Our work culminated with a large Laughing Lymphercise workshop sponsored by the cancer hospital during Octobre Rose, breast cancer awareness month, so it was very worthwhile, and the bonus was the discovery of a dynamic Lymphedema care community in the **Hautes-Pyrénées**, in a town called **Luz St Sauveur**, 800 metres above sea level, south of Lourdes, based in a Medical Thermal Spa called **Luzéa**. (www.thermesdeluz.fr)

Huguette Savoie and **Marie Laure Barrailié** are the therapists leading a team providing therapy using every imaginable water delivery system: individual jet baths and massage showers, a swimming pool, a walking pool, a Jacuzzi and Hydrojet massage beds, combined with the most up to date, and ever evolving, lymphedema therapy: manual lymphatic drainage, bandaging, and



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in depth self-care education. The Thermal Centre is in a historic building that has been updated as much as possible without taking away from original protected architectural features. Primarily a medical centre it differs from what North Americans envisage as a luxury health spa: here a regimen is prescribed according to the individual and a doctor follows your progress over three appointments during a three week (18 day) treatment session.

It may seem counter intuitive to travel long distances for lymphedema care when we know that long-haul air flights may increase swelling. I imagine though, that there are many frustrated, adventurous lymphedema patients who would really enjoy combining medical lymphedema thermal spa care with stunning views and French village life. That is why I wanted to tell you about it because it was a revelation!



Luzéa thermal shower.

Currently there is only one regular Laughing Lymphercise class that I am aware of that continues in Kitchener on Thursday mornings. For personal reasons, I have not been available to teach ongoing classes recently. I do answer questions via my websites www.rosemarykelly.ca and www.laughing-lymphercise.com and give people suggestions on alternatives to Laughing Lymphercise. I hope to get back to regular teaching next year.

Since Laughing Lymphercise classes are not taught everywhere, I am often asked about exercise alternatives, post-surgery, for people at risk of lymphedema. Basic rules for a safe exercise class are simple enough. First, drains must be out and incisions must be healed. Do exercises sitting on a stable chair, or standing near enough to it that you can hold on for balance. Exercise is not a competition, so, in a group setting, try to ignore what everyone else can or cannot accomplish, and only do what feels comfortable for yourself, avoid floor work (pushing yourself up off the floor) in the early stages of your recovery. Slow movements are best so that you can be aware of your point of pain and not go past it, in order to avoid ripping and tearing scar tissue and other injury. Tai Chi and Qi Gong

“So, breathe, laugh and move, dance around the living room and feel better.”



Luzéa main relaxing room.

are excellent choices. Seated exercise classes are a good option and of course, movement in water is brilliant. As long as whoever is teaching you knows about lymphedema and is able to suggest modified movements for you, great. Never fatigue the affected or at risk limb and always wear your compression while exercising (on land). Listen to and watch your body.

On the subject of Laughter Yoga, I feel that a regular laughter yoga class can be too physically intense especially soon after surgery. If you have a laughter yoga teacher who knows about lymphedema and offers adapted or shorter, classes, great!

I have always ‘prescribed’ comedy shows and movies. When women contact me soon after a cancer diagnosis and learn about the health benefits of laughter, they are delighted to be able to convey this message to their loved ones so that everyone feels that they have permission to laugh. This lifts the atmosphere in the home and gives family and friends a way to cope during in a very hard time.

So, breathe, laugh and move, dance around the living room and feel better. ■

References

1. *Lymphoedema* edited by Karen Jenns, Robert G. Twycross, Jacquelyne Todd.