

# Lymphoedema up in lights

*Mt Wilga has developed a resource for patients to assist in the self management of lymphoedema*

**M**t Wilga Private Hospital on Sydney's Upper North Shore, in conjunction with the Australasian Lymphology Association (ALA), recently hosted a production crew to develop a self-care educational resource for patients called *Lymphoedema - Survive and Thrive: How to Look After Your Lymphoedema*.

Mt Wilga Private Hospital, part of Ramsay Health Care, has over 20 years of experience in managing patients who have lymphoedema. During that time, the program has developed an established reputation both nationally and internationally for the provision of a comprehensive multidisciplinary treatment approach aimed at achieving quality outcomes for patients presenting with fully developed lymphoedema.

Due to the growth of the service and in response to patient need, Mt Wilga is soon to be offering an extension to their existing programs through the introduction of an Oncology Rehabilitation and Lymphoedema Program - a program for patients at risk of developing Stage II (persistent) lymphoedema. Mt Wilga already offers neurological oncology rehabilitation, so this latest development ensures the provision of a full complement of services across the lymphoedema clinical spectrum. The aspects of care that may be covered in the program are:

- Bio-impedance Spectroscopy—used to screen for lymphoedema before any clinical signs are evident
- Education relating to risk reduction strategies
- Strength, balance and gait re-training
- Therapy to assist with massage, skin care, scar management, laser therapy and garment prescription
- Occupational therapy to maximise independence
- Exercise prescription to establish an exercise routine





(Left) Some of the Mt Wilga lymphoedema team comprising of physiotherapists, occupational therapists, exercise physiologists and support staff

(Below left) Mt Wilga CEO, Jude Emmer, (left), with the lymphoedema 'crew' at the launch of the DVD at the State Parliament of NSW

Sally Kava, lymphoedema therapist assisting a patient with the application of a garment

*“Research has shown that rehabilitation post cancer diagnosis, can improve the quality of life for people with cancer and their families”*

- Hydrotherapy
- Dietetics for education and advice regarding nutrition and weight management
- Psychology for education and advice concerning stress management, anxiety, grief and loss

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At Mt Wilga approximately 70% of patients present with secondary lymphoedema. It is the most common type of lymphoedema, which develops following damage to the lymphatic system. The damage may occur as a result of some cancer treatments including the removal of lymph nodes, following radiotherapy to lymph node groups or with the progression of malignant disease. The onset of lymphoedema may be at any time, occurring within months of the damage or it may appear years later.

An opportunity recently came about to harness Mt Wilga's clinical experience and long association with managing lymphoedema by developing a resource for patients to assist in the self management of their condition. Mt Wilga kindly received a bequest from a previous patient who was so pleased with the reduction in the size of her leg, and the subsequent positive affect on her life following treatment,

that she wanted other people also to benefit from the advice she had been given.

It was the patient's wish that the money be used to help people with lymphoedema who might have difficulty accessing full treatment.

The filming took place over three full days, with patients, clinicians, and Dr Helen Mackie, a rehabilitation physician at Mt Wilga, volunteering their time to share stories and experiences of either living with lymphoedema, or providing advice on self-care strategies.

The DVD covers topics such as basic self-massage techniques, skin care, garment care and exercise suggestions, but emphasises that these strategies do not replace the need to consult a qualified lymphoedema therapist.

The DVD was launched at the State Parliament of NSW by Marie Ficarra, parliamentary secretary to Health Minister Jillian Skinner as part of Lymphoedema Awareness Month in March.

Clinicians, patients and carers, who all agreed that the resource was highly valuable and long overdue, attended the event.

The resource is available in a number of formats including a web video that can be downloaded off the internet through the ALA website [www.lymphoedema.org.au/](http://www.lymphoedema.org.au/). 

*By Dimity O'Leary*