

April 25, 2019

The Honorable Earl Blumenauer
1111 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

This is my formal endorsement of the Lymphedema Treatment Act (S.518/H.R.1948).


I've specialized in this field for over 20 years, am the author of a book chapter on the subject and served on the American Society of Breast Surgeons Expert Panel on lymphedema that published its findings in the Annals of Surgical Oncology¹. I currently serve on the Board of the Lymphology Association of North America that administers the examination certifying medical professionals in the treatment of lymphedema (CLT-LANA). The gold standard of lymphedema treatment is the application of MEDICAL COMPRESSION GARMENTS. This fact is well researched. Compression garments are medical devices. They may look like familiar support stockings and sleeves, but they are different. Compression garments for lymphedema have specialized characteristics that are necessary for the treatment and control of this complex condition. I continue to practice full time in this field. Nearly every day, I see patients with the consequences of poorly treated lymphedema because their insurance companies and Medicare are denying them the correct medical treatment.

It is unacceptable that the only proven effective treatment for lymphedema, medical compression garments, is not covered by many insurance carriers including Medicare. The Lymphedema Treatment Act would rectify this error.

Lymphedema is a chronic, progressive disease of the lymphatic system that leads to enlargement of affected body parts as well as serious infections. The lymphatic vessels are the conduits of cellular debris that has to be destroyed within the lymph nodes to protect us from bacteria, viruses, tumor cells and other foreign matter that would kill us if we did not have a lymph system. So, lymphedema is not just a liquid swelling problem, it is an immune system defect. As lymphatic debris progresses and builds up under the skin, the affected person's skin becomes stretched, hardened and damaged making the skin an ineffective barrier to foreign matter and a breeding ground for more bacteria to get into the body. As the body part becomes larger, it becomes heavier, leading to damage to tendons and joints. The condition becomes ever more expensive to the person and insurance companies because of the infections, hospitalizations, and damage to other tissues. The condition becomes disfiguring, socially isolating and can become disabling such that the person may not be able to work.

Medical compression devices, in the form of specialized compression garments and bandages, treat these defects and reduce the secondary complications of the disease. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Nancy A Hutchison, MD

References:

1. McLaughlin, S.A., DeSnyder, S.M., Klimberg, S. et al. Ann Surg Oncol (2017) 24: 2827. <https://doi.org/10.1245/s10434-017-5964-6>
2. Stubblefield, M. (2019) *Cancer rehabilitation: Principles and practice* (2nd ed.) (pp. 1075-1099) New York: Springer Publishing Company.
3. Hutchison, N. *Diagnosis and Treatment of Edema and Lymphedema in the Cancer Patient. Rehabilitation Nursing* (2018) 43(4):229-24