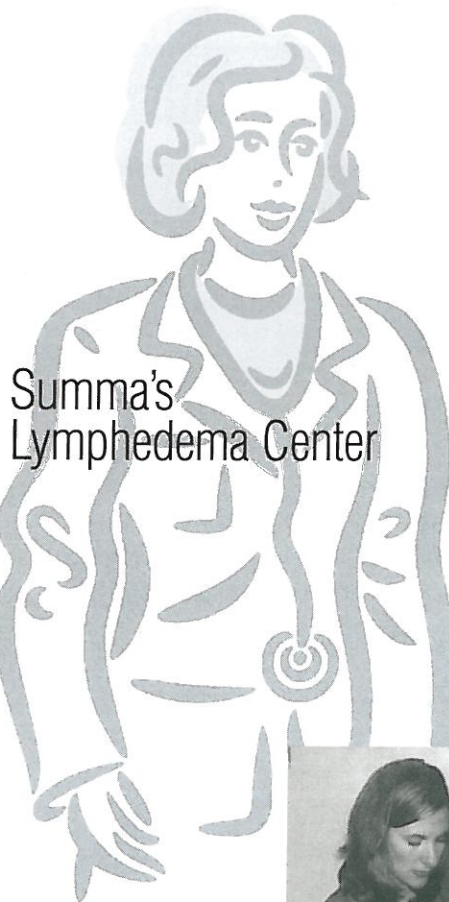


Summa Focus



Summa's
Lymphedema Center



Regan McCord, OTR/L, unwraps the bandages from a patient's legs. At Summa's Lymphedema Center, bandaging is done a special way to help decrease the fluid retention in the extremities.

Unveiling the Mystery of Lymphedema

Treatment Now Available at Summa's Lymphedema Center

by Lin Danes

For some, the disease develops for no determined reason, either at birth or later in life. For others, it is triggered by damage to the lymphatic system, perhaps as a result of trauma, surgery, radiation, cancer, infection or scarring. For the three million Americans afflicted, the consequences include severe discomfort, "heaviness" and decreased function in the extremities caused by the retention of lymphatic fluid which the body is unable to expel. Left untreated, it can lead to pain, poor wound healing, permanent skin changes, functional disability and cellulitis, a skin infection that may require hospitalization.

The condition is lymphedema. And, for years, it has been shrouded in mystery because no known treatment existed in the United States. Today, Summa offers a solution — the Lymphedema Center, established in July 1997 and located on the third floor at St. Thomas Hospital.

Here, Yasmin Heater, M.D., heads one of the two physician-run lymphedema programs in Ohio. She and a team of specially trained occupational therapists, physical therapists, and occupational and physical therapy assistants are among a small group of health

care professionals with the knowledge to treat lymphedema. They have all obtained certification at University Hospitals of Cleveland, as well as at medical centers in San Diego and Wisconsin.

Summa's Lymphedema Center specializes in providing comprehensive decongestive therapy (CDT). The technique originated in Europe in the 1940s. Because the U.S. has just started to integrate this treatment method into health care within the last three to five years, many health care professionals and lymphedema patients are unaware of the fact that treatment is available — at last.

CDT is a painless procedure comprised of:

- ♦ compression bandaging;
- ♦ manual lymphatic drainage (a type of massage designed to stimulate contraction of inactive lymphatic channels);
- ♦ exercise regime combined with patient education; and
- ♦ vasopneumatic pumps.

Treatments average three weeks in duration, although more severe cases may require a commitment of six months to one year. When possible, instruction is also provided to family members on various techniques to help manage lymphedema on a day-to-day basis.

"It is because we are a physician-centered program that we are truly unique," said Denise Elsey, an occupational therapist at the



McCord adjusts pressure on the vasopneumatic pump, a gradient pressure machine, which pumps fluid out of the extremities to help reduce swelling.

center. "This means patients are definitely medically cleared before we start any treatment.

The lymphedema team often works with the patient's primary physician to prepare an individual for therapy. In many patients, several liters of fluid are mobilized. This requires cardiac and respiratory monitoring, as well as wound care management.

After medical approval by Dr. Heater, patients begin individualized CDT programs. However, the key in all treatment is compression bandaging. This method of bandaging is unique because of the bandages themselves, the way they are wrapped and the amount of pressure applied. Treatment results in:

- ♦softening the underlying tissues;
- ♦lessening heaviness;
- ♦increasing range of motion and function;
- ♦promoting wound healing; and
- ♦decreasing size.

Once the lymphedema reaches a point where it can be controlled,

the patient assumes management of the condition at home. This is a two-step process. During the day, lymphedema patients must wear a custom-fitted compression garment to help the affected limb maintain the desired size. In the evening, patients will bandage themselves, as taught by Summa's Lymphedema Center, using layers of compression bandages.

"We are truly a total center," said Elsey. "We care about the patient and how lymphedema has affected their whole life, we have a physician in place, we get them out of acute stages, we teach them maintenance techniques, and we provide an active support group." The support group, which is facilitated by Sally Olzewski, R.N., meets the third Tuesday of each month.

"The overall goal is to improve a patient's quality of life," said Dr. Heater. "Additionally, the goal is to make the patient independent in performing self-therapy — and we teach them that." ♦

For more information about the center or the next support group meeting, please call (330) 379-9643.



Demolition of the "construction house" will make room for a patient parking lot.

Summa Construction Update

Surgery Addition and Emergency Department Expansion by Scott Albright

As the construction continues onward, we are also moving inward and outward. Until recently, most of the work has been focused on the new portion of the building. Now, construction teams have moved into the existing portions of the hospital to complete the transition between "new" and "old." These connections to the hospital are at the emergency department and surgery operating rooms 18 and 19.

During the month of June, the first phase of the emergency department will be completed. This phase consists of the new patient triage area, one-half of the waiting area, a new patient-coordinator desk and a new, larger women's bathroom.

During the month of June, we will begin some of the exterior site work. The "construction house" at the corner of Nebraska St. and Cobb Alley has been demolished to make room for a new parking lot designated for surgery patients at the new main entrance. Also, the remaining receiving dock planning is underway. It will call for the installation of an underground snowmelt system, which will create a cleaner and safer entry to the building. As the summer months approach, you will notice more progress on all of the exterior site work.

We have placed an architect's rendering of the finished building in the cafeteria hall for your viewing.

If you have any questions or concerns about this project or any other construction project, call the construction department at (330) 375-3146. ♦