QUALITY-OF-LIFE AND BODY IMAGE IMPAIRMENTS IN PATIENTS WITH LYMPHEDEMA

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ABSTRACT

The psychological and social consequences of chronic lymphedema are still often overlooked, as is the frequency with which they occur. Secondary lymphedema after mastectomy or breast-conservation procedures following the diagnosis of breast cancer is especially common and represents a substantial problem for those affected. The aim of this study was to investigate differences in body image and quality of life (QOL) between female lymphedema patients and trauma patients and to further monitor the changes in female lymphedema patients during three weeks of rehabilitation. This survey was conducted on 80 female patients at the State Hospital of Wolfsberg/Carinthia, Austria, 40 were trauma patients and the other 40 patients had some type of lymphedema, 20 of these patients were located in the general lymphedema ward and 20 in rehabilitation. The Frankfurt Body Image Questionnaire was used to determine body image, and the German version of the Short Form-36 Health Survey was used to determine QOL. Lymphedema patients show significantly lower body image scores in seven of nine areas compared to trauma patients. Female lymphedema patients also describe their QOL as being lower in the areas of general health perception, vitality and mental well-being. After rehabilitation, there were improvements in the evaluation of physical functioning and an increased acceptance of the body. Patients also showed a significant increase in health perception, vitality and mental health.