

INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF FILARIAL LYMPHEDEMA FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

S.R. Narahari, T.J. Ryan, P.E. Mahadevan, K.S. Bose, K.S. Prasanna

Institute of Applied Dermatology (SRN,PEM,KSB,KSP), Kasaragod, India, and Department of Dermatology (TJR), Oxford Medical School, England

ABSTRACT

The Global Alliance for the Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis (GAELF) has recommended exploring local health traditions of skin care and a low cost treatment paradigm for rural communities has been proposed by Vaqas and Ryan. Our case study incorporates these promising treatments for use in treating filariasis in rural communities. Patients having lymphedema of one or both lower limbs (skin: normal, thickened or with trophic/warty changes) received treatment components from ayurveda, yoga and biomedicine simultaneously: including soap wash, phanta soaking, Indian manual lymph drainage (IMLD), pre- and post-IMLD yoga exercises, and compression using bandages for 194 days, along with diet restrictions and oral herbal medicines indicated for "elephantiasis" in Ayurveda. Entry points when infected were treated with biomedical drugs. The study was conducted in the reverse pharmacology design. 112 patients and 149 lower limbs completed 194 days of treatment during 2003-2006. Significant improvements were observed in the limb circumference measurements and the frequency of acute dermatolymphangioadenitis, use of preventive antibiotics and reduction in the number of entry points were also improved. The objective to obtain significant benefit for a common problem using locally available, sustainable and affordable means has been achieved. It has not been our purpose to show that the regimen employed is better than another but the results do pose the question—"Are there components of Ayurvedic medicine that deserve further study?" It is important to understand that the regimen has been delivered mostly at home and that participants we have treated, representing a population suffering from a common problem, have not had access to effective conservative therapy that is culturally acceptable, safe, and efficacious.