

## MANUAL LYMPH DRAINAGE FOR DERCUM'S DISEASE

- Dercum's disease is a painful fat disorder listed as a rare disease by the NIH and NORD.
- People with DD have widespread abnormal fat including small, tender nodules that feel like beans in a bag (diffuse DD), large lipomas or angiolipomas (nodular DD), or mixed type with nodules and lipomas.
- Additional tissue findings can include swelling, thickening or thinning of the skin, increased connective tissue and fibrosis, and loss of elasticity and distended vessels including varicosities.
- The abnormal tender fat can be anywhere from the head to the bottom of the feet with a focus on the arms, neck, chest, low back, abdomen, legs and groin.
- Women with DD complain of tender nodules in the vaginal vault and enlarged, swollen and tender labia.
- Lymph vessels are dilated allowing lymphatic leakage.

**Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD) therapist requirements:** Complete all courses for MLD for lymphedema.

Dercum's disease is a pre-lymphedema condition that responds to manual lymph drainage with a reduction in volume and pain.

People with DD may also have gastrointestinal distress and/or pelvic pain dysfunction.

Consult with a pelvic pain physical therapist especially if pain and or fat nodules do not improve with MLD.

People with DD may also have lymphedema.

### Approach for MLD in DD

- 1) Assess the patient's ability to be touched gently, and deeply; congestion and pain may prevent deeper manipulation initially. Use indirect pressure with the knees bent.
- 2) If the pain is widespread and severe, consider clearing the abdomen and trunk then treating only a limited area during the first few treatment sessions. You should be able to treatment extensively over time. A contra-indication/precaution to MLD on the abdomen is unexplained pain.
- 3) Treat all areas to move what may be a small amount of very inflammatory pre-lymph fluid from around the fat nodules.
- 4) MLD should be performed around all lipomas with gentle manipulation to free the lipoma from surrounding tissue structures.
- 5) People with DD may experience worsening of their symptoms after MLD including pain and gastrointestinal distress. Be sure to discuss this with your patients.
- 6) Bruising is not uncommon after MLD for DD.
- 7) Teach self MLD whenever possible; MLD is a lifelong treatment for DD.
- 8) People with DD are less likely to benefit from wrapping unless they have lymphedema. In the absence of lymphedema, wrapping may worsen DD.
- 9) Recommend compression garments:
  - a. The usual pressure range is 15-30mmHg.
  - b. Consider softer fabrics with a patterned weave.
  - c. Usual garments include full leggings (legs and abdomen) or pantyhose, a vest and arm sleeves.
  - d. Belisse bra gives adequate thoracic compression.
  - e. Arm sleeves must cover the shoulder not stop at the upper arm; for example, consider Solidea arm sleeves or Elvarex sleeves with cap and bra connectors.