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Dercum's disease and the lymphatic system

Dercum's disease is a disorder of the vascular system in which both blood vessel function and lymphatic flow are affected. We have proven this in both the positive response of Dercum's disease to manual lymph drainage¹ (also my experience) and in discovering altered lymphatic vessel structure and function using near infrared fluorescence imaging.^{2, 3}

I recommend two lymphatic pumps for treatment of Dercum's disease: Lymphapress Optimal (888-596-7421) or Flexitouch (Tactile Systems 866-435-3948). These are the only two pumps I allow my patients to use. It is malpractice to prescribe sequential compression pumps (SCDs) usually reserved for prevention of deep venous thromboses or for treatment of cardiovascular edema (E0650; E0651). In the latter two situations, the lymphatic vessels are intact and pump normally. As a consequence of using SCDs in Dercum's disease, SCD pumps push the fluid up the leg into the abdominal area where it accumulates due to lymphatic dysfunction. As this fluid sits in the tissue with all its nutrients and protein, fat grows. From published data, we know that lymph makes fat grow.⁴ With the Lymphapress or Flexitouch, the abdomen is treated along with the leg and the chest is treated along with the arm preventing dangerous pooling of lymph fluid. An E0652 device with a segmented, multi-ported pump allows for individual pressure calibration at each port. This allows the patient to alter pressure in areas of severe pain as found in Dercum's disease. This allows people to tolerate the pump when they do not tolerate wrapping for lymphedema. Since Dercum's disease affects the entire body, I recommend both the upper and lower bodies are treated.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "KH", written over a horizontal line.

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References

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3. Sevick-Muraca EM. Translation of near-infrared fluorescence imaging technologies: emerging clinical applications. *Annu Rev Med* 2012;63:217-31. doi:10.1146/annurev-med-070910-83323. Epub 2011 Oct 27.
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