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Cardiff Met awarded funding for crucial cancer care research

Cardiff Metropolitan University is offering a new technique of reflexology to women suffering from lymphoedema following breast cancer surgery.

A team at the University's Cardiff School of Health Sciences has received £12,263 in funding from leading cancer charity Tenvous to carry out research into this new and innovative method which maps the pattern of massage points in the neck, shoulder, upper arm, then lower arm used in Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD) onto specific reflex points in the feet.

It is estimated that around 20% of all women who undergo breast cancer surgery experience swelling in their arm post-surgery which affects their quality of life and makes simple tasks such as ironing more difficult.

Reflexology is commonly used in cancer care but this new Reflexology Lymph Drainage (RLD) technique developed by Cardiff Met graduate Sally Kay, could change the way lymphoedema is currently treated.

As part of the BSc programme in Complementary Therapies, which involves study in three bodywork methods: holistic massage; clinical aromatherapy; and reflexology; Sally conducted a previous pilot in 2011 as part of her dissertation research project, which demonstrated a marked reduction in fluid retention and arm lymphoedema in a group of six participants.

The RLD technique mimics the MLD process, but only the feet are touched to stimulate the neck, arm and shoulder areas. Cardiff Met's Complementary Therapies programme is partnered with three leading professional bodies - :



the Massage Training Institute (MTI); the Association of Reflexologists (AoR); the International Federation of Professional Aromatherapists (IFPA.)

Senior Lecturer Judith Whatley who is Cardiff Met's Reflexology module leader said: "Developing a standard therapeutic technique using research and scientific measurement is made possible by the way Complementary Therapies is taught here at Cardiff Metropolitan University. It is important to remember that there are very real applications for these therapies within healthcare, and we prepare our graduates very thoroughly for work within a range of healthcare settings, including the NHS.

"We are very excited to receive research funding from Tenovus. It gives us the opportunity to really look in depth at the effects of this ground-breaking treatment on people who may really benefit from it.

"As one of only two Universities in Wales to offer a science based programme of study into complementary therapies, we are truly at the forefront of research into the therapeutic effects of reflexology."

This new trial will be conducted on 30 participants from three centres in Cardiff, Bridgend and Tredegar, to establish if the results from the 2011 pilot can be replicated.

Sally, who won the Federation of Holistic Therapists' Excellence in Practice Award 2012 for Research and Development into Reflexology Lymph Drainage (RLD) for her research, worked within complementary therapies at drop-in cancer care clinics before starting at Cardiff Met in 2007.

Cardiff Metropolitan hosted the CAMSTRAND conference in 2012, the UK's foremost research conference for academics researching complementary medicine, where the results from the pilot were presented. .



These latest trials at Cardiff Met also use a clinically verified measurement technique for measuring the volume of fluid held in the arm. Limb volume circumferential measurement (LVCM) is a means of measuring the limb affected by lymphoedema and calculating the volume of fluid present. The trials include measurements both before and after reflexology treatment.

Sally said: “Bridging the gap between reflexology practice and proving its worth, is notoriously difficult. I hope that this initial project may form the cornerstone of future studies, which will contribute to the understanding, and integration of reflexology.”

Judith Whatley added: ‘We at Cardiff Metropolitan University are keen to promote the use of reflexology and other therapies in standard healthcare. Reflexology is already used across the UK in palliative care settings. It is important that we understand the potential of therapies such as these in improving the quality of life of those living with lymphoedema. We look forward to publishing the results of the study later this year.’

Breast cancer patients interested in taking part in these trials to alleviate lymphoedema should call Judith on 029 2020 5613 or 07811 896419.

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