

# A System Approach to Optimising Lymphoedema Care in South East London

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## BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

- Lymphoedema, characterised by tissue swelling due to inefficient lymph fluid drainage, affects over 200,000 people in the UK<sup>1</sup>. Secondary lymphoedema associated with cancer or its treatment is common especially in cancers involving the lymphatic system, breast, vulval, penile, and head and neck cancers<sup>1</sup>. While no cure exists, proactive strategies can delay progression and improve quality of life<sup>2</sup>.
- Nationally, service delivery faces various challenges, including service gaps, inadequate funding, and workforce shortages. As lymphoedema teams support both cancer and non-cancer patients, ownership falls through the gaps and opportunities for service growth and development are missed. The services' small size compounds the difficulties, emphasising the need to address them as a system.
- In response to local challenges, South East London Cancer Alliance (SELCA) initiated a collaborative effort to address the absence of a lymphoedema service in one borough and review existing services. SEL includes five specialist lymphoedema services covering six boroughs, comprising four community-based services for both cancer and non-cancer patients and one acute-based service dedicated to cancer patients.

## AIMS & OBJECTIVES

SELCA's goal was to unite SEL Lymphoedema Services, enhancing patient care, reducing waiting times, empowering the wider healthcare workforce to manage low-level lymphoedema, and optimising referral processes. Emphasising mutual support and promoting stronger connections among small teams, we sought support from the Integrated Care System for a strategic and resilient lymphoedema service in SEL.

## METHODOLOGY

Individual meetings were conducted with Lymphoedema Service Leads across SEL to understand the services, challenges, and opportunities within each service.

The SELCA Lymphoedema Leads group was established to bring together Service Leads for regular meetings, group discussions, sharing best practice, ideas generation, amplifying a collective voice, fostering a unified approach, and developing shared actions. External engagement involved discussions with primary care representatives, presentations at professional meetings, and consultations with key stakeholders.

The team conducted a webinar for healthcare professionals, highlighting lymphoedema awareness, preventive measures, and management strategies, with a focus on supporting patients with low-level lymphoedema.

## RESULTS

1. **Reduced waiting times:** Strategic initiatives reduced waiting times by redirecting patients to local services.
2. **Enhanced referral process:** Standardised SEL-wide referral form undergoing a pilot phase.
3. **Patient group sessions:** Online and face-to-face patient group sessions, aiding self-management.
4. **Empowering patients:** SELCA Personalised Cancer Care website resources offering information while waiting. Plans are underway to integrate with the SEL referral form.
5. **Support for newly commissioned Greenwich Service and patient experience:** Assisting in the setup, launch, and operationalisation, including planned patient focus groups.
6. **Support for Transforming Cancer Services Team workstream:** Efforts to boost interest in lymphoedema as a career and integrate lymphoedema into the Aspirant Cancer Career and Education Development (ACCEND) Programme.
7. **Identification of further work:** Addressing service gaps, inclusion criteria inequalities, additional training, and exploring system wide garment procurement.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

SEL Lymphoedema Leads produced impactful results by working together, reducing professional isolation, and amplifying their collective voice. Unlocking economies of scale enabled comprehensive responses to challenges.

With a unified group, SEL Leads are well positioned for future developments and continued commitment to enhancing patient care and support.

## SERVICE LEADS REFLECTIONS

"Being part of SELCA is a very positive experience. SELCA brings our local boroughs closer together, supports our innovative thinking, helps organise us and enables us to work as partners. The patients are at the heart of what we do, and we are stronger as a team."

Guy's Cancer Centre



"I have found external support invaluable in the unique world of Lymphoedema. Collaborating with colleagues in SEL enables unified efforts in defining approaches to service delivery, despite budget constraints. Peer support is invaluable in this specialised field".

Greenwich Service



"Collaborative working is of benefit to both patients and providers and SELCA have been instrumental in facilitating this. Their work has resulted in an improvement in accessibility to services where previously none existed, and they continue to work to support practitioners to improve the quality of life and outcomes for patients within the network."

Lewisham Service



"It is exciting to work collaboratively with such supportive colleagues. Inequalities in service provision across SEL are being addressed and colleagues in SELCA are supporting services and helping with communication with service providers"

Bromley Service

"It is great that clinicians from different lymphoedema services are working together for a common goal: to raise awareness of lymphoedema and improve the quality of the care we provide. For better outcomes and better lives"

Bexley Service

SELCA funded a online event for healthcare professionals in all settings to learn about lymphoedema, including what causes it, its symptoms, and how you can help manage it.

You can watch the recording on [Guy's Cancer Academy website!](https://www.guyscanceracademy.co.uk)



Guys Cancer Academy

NHS South East London Cancer Alliance

Lymphoedema: How to be aware of and manage it in your role

Wednesday 8 November 5pm-6:30pm

To hear patient experiences with lymphoedema, go to [www.lymphoconnect.co.uk](https://www.lymphoconnect.co.uk)

[www.guyscanceracademy.co.uk/symptom-of-the-month](https://www.guyscanceracademy.co.uk/symptom-of-the-month)

For more information on lymphoedema management and how to refer to our SEL services, scan the QR code to visit our SELCA website!



### References:

1.National Health Service. (2023). Lymphoedema. [online] Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lymphoedema/> [Accessed 11 March 2024].

2.NHS Transformation Partners. (2020). Lymphoedema Commissioning Guidance 2020. [PDF] Available at: <https://www.transformationpartners.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Lymphoedema-Commissioning-Guidance-2020.pdf> [Accessed 11 March 2024].