

Interpretation of Clinical Assessment: Are we getting the right answers from measurements alone? Workshop

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Early detection and intervention of lymphoedema (LO) has changed dramatically since the early 1990s when a diagnosis of LO was often made on a brief history and examination of the severely swollen limb. Over the last 20 years, public awareness and education has changed to a point where there is heightened concern for early diagnosis. Research has placed an emphasis on early detection from serial monitoring using a variety of objective measurement methods.

Proactive serial monitoring needs to be coupled with clinical interpretation of change over time rather than a primary focus on objective measurement alone, particularly when measurements are “within the normal range”. It is imperative that the quest for the ‘Holy Grail’ of a gold standard for objective measurement in research does not result in a delay for early detection and intervention of LO. Moving into the future requires learning from all past experiences of patients, clinicians and researchers.

The case studies being used across the Conference will be discussed to illustrate the role of clinical assessment integrated with serial objective measurement monitoring to ensure that early changes suggestive of lymphatic overload or LO are identified. Case 1 is a woman with unilateral arm LO following breast cancer treatment and will demonstrate the delay in early detection for intervention. Case 2 will explore the difficulties of early detection of bilateral leg LO while Case 3 will highlight difficulties in assessment of LO in parts of the body which are not measured objectively with ease.