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The lymphedemas as chronic diseases

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Lymphedemas (LE) are edemas demonstrated as of lymphatic origin and LE may be observed at the level of any part of the human body. In occidental and northern countries, these LE are usually secondary and related to surgeries and/or radiation therapy for cancer (for instance, around 20% of the women after complete axillary node dissection for breast cancer). In tropics worldwide and in Southeast Asia, this LE may be secondary to infection by filarial parasites (40 million people). Everywhere, some LE may also be primary (10% of these lary LE are inherited and with provable genetic abnormalities). The incidence of this lary LE is usually reported to be low but might be (largely) under-estimated. Anyway, these clinical situations represent chronic diseases, also sometimes very heavy and disabling. There are no medical treatments (except in infectious diseases) and although some surgical approaches begin to be proposed, the treatment of these situations remains mainly based on physical therapies combining manual lymphatic drainages, therapeutic multi-layer bandagings, the use of pneumatic compression systems. These treatments will however last the patients' whole-life. In-between short intensive therapies, maintenance therapeutic interventions are usually necessary as well as the wearing of elastic sleeves and/or stockings. Finally, one of the most frequent thinking from people faced to secondary LE is rather prevent them than to have to try to cure them. These situations are also unfortunately and poorly understood by people who try to treat these situations. The examinations however exist such as the functional and morphologic lymphoscintigraphy investigations. The doctors ignore them and/or do not use their results correctly. The patients themselves are also sometimes reluctant to undergo the proposed examinations although, when these investigations and their implications are well explained, they are usually compliant. Lymphedemas represent chronic diseases but they can be improved.



Biography

Pierre Bourgeois is a Specialist in Nuclear Medicine and in Radio-radium-therapy. He performed his first investigations of the lymphatic system in 1978. He is Head of Clinic in the Service of Nuclear Medicine of the Jules Bordet's Institute, also In-charge of Multi-disciplinary Clinic of Lymphology of the Institute. He is weekly in contact with patients consulting him for edematous situations and is working with physiotherapists and surgeons involved in the management and treatments of these patients. He was past-President of the European Society of Lymphology and is now President of the Belgian Society of Lymphology (BeSL).

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