

From debilitating lymphedema to improved quality of life – Bandaging based on Fundamentals of Care (FoC)

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Introduction: A 57-year-old female with lymphoedema and a history of muscular dystrophy requiring permanent wheelchair use, presented with elephantiasis in both legs. She had severe lymphatic changes of the skin. The patient had constant pain in her skin, knees and feet. She described her life as excruciating. She was very psychologically affected by her situation. Before contact with our clinic the patient has had regular contact with the healthcare system. The patient's oedema has worsened during that period without any medical measures for investigation or treatment. This must be described as a serious failure in the healthcare system. Due to the extent of the oedema and the lymphatic changes in the skin, bandaging according to general guidelines was difficult, as this could potentially harm the patient. Furthermore, it was essential to take the patient's psychological needs and experience of the treatment into consideration to achieve the best outcome, which continuously formed the basis for new approaches in clinical practice. Aims of management were to reduce oedema and pain and improve quality of life.

Method: The case is a development project based on clinical nursing practice and involvement of the patient based on FoC. Planning and organization of treatment was carried out in a multidisciplinary team. During the process it was necessary to optimize the procedure several times. Among other things the frequency of bandaging was reduced significantly in order to meet the patient's needs.

Results: The process has shown that reduction of oedema can be achieved and that lymphatic skin changes are reversible, although the frequency of bandaging is reduced to meet the patient's needs. The patient now experiences less pain, has increased mobility and she describes her quality of life as significantly improved.

Conclusion: In the treatment of the patient's lymphoedema, the focus has been on establishing a good relationship with the patient in order to increase trust and predictability. We have succeeded in giving the patient peace and space to cope with her situation. With the FoC approach to nursing practice, it has been possible to adapt the organizational conditions and the treatment itself to the patient's needs and achieve the goal of the treatment.