

# 5 minutes with... lymphoedema specialists

Karen Morgan is the National Lymphoedema Education Lead in Wales. In 2021, the Lymphoedema Advice & Guidance line via Consultant Connect was launched across Wales.

The service allows clinicians to seek rapid Telephone and/or Photo Messaging Advice & Guidance from specialists, like Karen, for queries regarding lymphoedema/chronic oedema. Calls and messages are answered by oedema specialists from Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 4pm.

Karen talks to us about what she thinks of the service and how using Consultant Connect to provide lymphoedema-related advice has improved patient care.

## 1 How is Consultant Connect used for lymphoedema in your area?

"The lymphoedema service is available across Wales and is mostly used by Primary Care clinicians, such as GPs and community nurses, when they have a patient query that needs a rapid response from a specialist.

Primary Care clinicians needing advice can contact lymphoedema specialists by using Telephone Advice & Guidance and/or Photo Messaging Advice & Guidance via Consultant Connect. Accessing lymphoedema specialists in this way is much quicker and more efficient for clinicians and their patients. Previous conventional routes of contact, usually via the local lymphoedema services clinic line, would take longer, due to one phone line being used by all patients and clinicians."

## 2 What has your experience been in answering Advice & Guidance calls so far with Consultant Connect?

"It has been a positive experience. There is a rota to ensure there are at least six specialists available to answer calls throughout the day, currently Monday to Friday.

I have spoken to a variety of professionals including GPs, consultants and community nurses, who have wanted advice and guidance in relation to the patients whom they are currently managing. Queries such as 'can I refer a patient into the services?' and 'what can I encourage the patient to do prior to them being seen by the lymphoedema service?'. As well as asking for a patient to be reviewed, we also receive questions about whether the Health Care Professional (HCP) can increase the compression and if the patient has lymphorrhoea (leaking legs), can they start bandaging? We also receive calls relating to cellulitis. This is to be expected as chronic oedema increases your risk of cellulitis, but some patients also experience red legs which can on occasion be confused with cellulitis. So, we are excited, as a service, to now be able to provide the Photo Messaging aspect of Consultant Connect to support a more efficient diagnosis and effective treatment. I would encourage HCPs to use Consultant Connect as a rapid informative resource in practice."



### 3 How would you encourage Primary Care colleagues to use this service? What are the benefits for them?

"If a GP or a nurse has a patient in front of them for whom they require prompt answers relating to chronic oedema, I encourage them to call us through Consultant Connect. This way, they can get through to a specialist without delay, who will support them in providing the patient with advice, and efficient management with a prompt referral for support with their care."



### 4 What are the benefits for you as Secondary Care?

"Personally, I get great satisfaction from being able to share my expertise and assist other HCPs. I have saved the Consultant Connect number to my phone contacts, meaning I know when I am being called for advice and guidance. It is reassuring to know though if I am in a clinic or unable to take the call that one of the team will be available to support the HCP in practice."

I am excited and looking forward to improving this resource support further with the addition of Photo Messaging Advice & Guidance requests because this will provide additional context. It can be challenging to give advice over the phone without a visual and the ability to send and receive photos will enhance the advice we are able to provide."

### We also spoke to Matthew Griffiths, National Lymphoedema Specialist, who has recently used Consultant Connect to provide Advice & Guidance to Primary Care. He describes his experience:

"I spoke to a GP who got through to us via Consultant Connect. He was calling for advice relating to a patient who was having difficulty getting their compression garments on and off due to a recent hernia. The GP asked me for input to help the patient with daily support to take off their garments. Although this isn't something the service offers, I was able to discuss different applicators and other suggestions to help the patient self-manage which the GP wasn't aware of, which was really positive."

I also informed the GP that I would get in touch with the local service to get the patient's appointment expedited, for which he was very grateful. As the patient was in the room with the GP at the time of the call, he was able to reassure them and relay the advice straight to them."

The other positive outcome of the call was that the GP felt he wasn't very familiar with lymphoedema, and as a result of the conversation he was keen to arrange some time with the lymphoedema team for his own education and development."

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