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The effect of the combined decongestive therapy on lymphedema, pain, range of motion of affected limb and quality of life of breast cancer survivors after mastectomy

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Background and Objective: In breast cancer survivors, secondary lymphedema is a very common problem. It can be as a result of cancer treatments such as surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. This change in limb volume along with chronic pain can cause changes in mood, difficulty in working, reducing physical activity and altering the quality of life. The aim of this study was to evaluate the effect of Combined Decongestive Therapy on reducing lymphedema and pain and increasing the mobility of the shoulder joint of the affected limb and improving the quality of life of these women after mastectomy.

Methods: This was a single-group, pre and post-test study, which was performed on 56 breast cancer survivor women who referred to Seyed Khandan clinic for consultation and treatment of lymphedema. Data were collected by using volumeter, goniometer, VAS and SF-36 Health Survey questionnaire.

Results: Participants were with an average age of 53.7 (10.5) and an average BMI of 28.07 (2.92). The results of Wilcoxon test showed significant differences in limb volume, pain score and range of shoulder joint motion between the

first and fifteenth sessions ($p < 0.05$). The average of the edema volume in the first session and fifteenth session were respectively 940 (662) and 484 (430), the average of pain score of the first session and 15th session were respectively 6.8 (1.8) and 1.9 (2.02), and the average of range of motion in the first session was 127 degrees (25.7) and in the fifteenth session was 172 degrees (10.1). The results also showed that the mean of overall quality of life, general health, physical and psychological status and social function in the fifteenth session showed significant differences ($p < 0.05$).

Discussion and conclusion: The results of this study showed that Combined Decongestive Therapy is effective in decreasing lymphedema and pain and increasing the range of motion of affected limb. The breast cancer survivors' quality of life also improved following this treatment. Since lymphedema causes physical and psychosocial disorders and decrease quality of life in this population, with early successful treatment, the possibility of recurrence of symptoms is reduced, so proper physical and psychological outcomes can be achieved.

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