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For 2 out of 5 Breast Cancer Survivors, Life-Long Lymphedema Follows

Breast Cancer Awareness Month should also shine a light on survivorship issues.

There are over 3.8 million breast cancer survivors in the United States. 40% will develop lymphedema as a result of their cancer treatment. As survivorship increases, so too does the prevalence of this potentially debilitating disease that requires daily, life-long management.

“When I was diagnosed with locally advanced breast cancer in 2007, I feared my two young children would grow up without a mother,” says Cindy Cronick, a Board member of the Lymphedema Advocacy Group. “But as hard as cancer was, in many ways the subsequent lymphedema has been more difficult. It’s only because of my prescription medical compression garments that I’m able to maintain my health and continue to function as a pharmacist, a wife, and a mother. And yet, for so many patients like me, compression therapy supplies are not covered by insurance.”

In 1998, recognizing the importance of comprehensive care both during and after breast cancer treatment, Congress passed the Women’s Health and Cancer Rights Act. Unfortunately, the coverage for medical compression supplies afforded to women through the WHCRA ends when these survivors reach Medicare age.

Due to an unintended gap in coverage, Medicare is currently unable to provide coverage for the compression garments and supplies that are the cornerstone of lymphedema treatment. But fortunately, a commonsense bipartisan solution is at hand.

The bipartisan Lymphedema Treatment Act (S.1315/H.R.3630) - sponsored by Senator Maria Cantwell (WA) and Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (IL-9) and cosponsored by 356 members of the House and 73 Senators - will amend Medicare statute to create a benefit category under which these medically necessary, prescribed supplies can be covered.

The use of medical compression has been proven to significantly reduce lymphedema-related infections and other complications, and is estimated to save Medicare \$1.3-\$1.5 billion dollars over 10 years through avoided hospitalizations.

This bill was recently unanimously advanced out of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. It's time for Congress to ensure that survivors have access to the medical supplies necessary to live full and productive lives after beating cancer by signing the Lymphedema Treatment Act into law.

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About the Lymphedema Advocacy Group

The [Lymphedema Advocacy Group](#) is a grassroots, all-volunteer organization of patients, caregivers, healthcare professionals and industry partners. Our mission is to advance lymphedema care in the United States by advocating for improved insurance coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of the disease. The Lymphedema Advocacy Group is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization.

Resources cited:

- 1.) <https://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/breast-cancer/statistics>
- 2.) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2645852/>
- 3.) <https://acsjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/cncr.25458>
- 4.) <https://lymphedematreatmentact.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Impact-of-Lymphedema-on-Cancer-Survivors.pdf>
- 5.) https://www.cms.gov/CCIIO/Programs-and-Initiatives/Other-Insurance-Protections/whcra_factsheet
- 6.) <https://lymphedematreatmentact.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Function-of-Compression.pdf>
- 7.) <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3630/cosponsors>
- 8.) <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/1315/cosponsors>
- 9.) <https://lymphedematreatmentact.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Reducing-Lymphedema-Related-Infections-and-Hospitalizations-Through-the-Use-of-Compression-Therapy.pdf>
- 10.) <https://lymphedematreatmentact.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Lymphedema-Treatment-Act-Savings-Estimate-One-Pager.pdf>