

HEALTH MINISTER ANNOUNCES NEW PLANS TO IMPROVE LYMPHOEDEMA SERVICES

A new strategy to improve access to high quality services for patients with lymphoedema has been announced by Health Minister, Edwina Hart.

Lymphoedema – the chronic swelling of the limbs – is a chronic debilitating condition and affects individuals physically, psychologically and socially.

It is estimated that around 6,000 people in Wales have lymphoedema.

Currently there is a wide variation in the organisation and delivery of services across Wales, with many sufferers unable to access appropriate diagnosis and treatment and some only being able to access services as a result of having cancer. The new strategy calls for a collaborative approach, with Wales' seven Health Boards working together to ensure a consistent service is provided to patients.

Some of the main aims of the Lymphoedema Strategy are to:

- Raise awareness of lymphoedema and how simple treatment strategies can improve a patient's quality of life
- Empower patients to maximise their independence and minimise the risks associated with lymphoedema
- Improve patient access to lymphoedema services
- Provide a comprehensive preventative approach to all patients at risk of developing lymphoedema

The seven Health Boards in Wales have been asked to develop plans by the end of March 2010 outlining how they will achieve the strategy's key action points.

To help drive forward the strategy's implementation, an all Wales project manager will be employed. Their responsibilities will include developing care pathways from assessment, diagnosis through to treatment.

Edwina Hart said: "It is essential that we ensure lymphoedema sufferers receive the right treatment, by the right professional, in the right place at the right time. The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to ensuring evidence-based service provision, underpinned by national and professional standards. For this reason the Assembly Government asked the Welsh Association of Lymphoedema Services to develop a strategy to direct and guide improvements over time."