



The Susan G. Komen
Breast Cancer Foundation

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Headquarters

November 16, 2005

Dear Member of Congress:

We are writing to enlist your support on an issue that is very important to the breast cancer community: patients' access to lymphedema treatment.

As you may know, it is not uncommon for breast cancer survivors who undergo mastectomy and lymph node removal as part of their treatment for breast cancer to develop a debilitating, painful, and disfiguring condition known as lymphedema. Presently, the recommended treatment for this condition is specialized massage therapy delivered by a certified lymphedema specialist. This treatment has proven effective in improving quality of life for survivors, and has prevented thousands of unnecessary hospitalizations.

Lymphedema therapists typically come from three disciplines: physical therapy (PT), nursing, and massage therapy. Historically, CMS reimbursed physicians who employed any of these types of health professionals to provide this important therapy to Medicare beneficiaries. However, pursuant to a recent change in policy, CMS will now only reimburse physicians who employ PTs to provide this service, and will no longer reimburse physicians who employ lymphedema therapists who possess a credential other than a PT license.

Of the approximately 4,400 people in the United States who have received lymphedema therapy training, a full 1/3 are either nurses, massage therapists, or some other health professional who has received the specialized training. These providers will not be able to provide important services to the patients who need them. Thus, failure to resolve this problem could result in the unnecessary pain and suffering of thousands of lymphedema patients.

The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation respectfully requests your assistance in changing this policy. Physicians working with breast cancer patients should have the ability to employ and utilize qualified lymphedema therapists, regardless of whether they are a nurse, a PT, or a massage therapist.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Diane Balma
Director of Public Policy