

# Facilitating allied health lymphoedema services using distance education, coaching and technology in rural and remote areas of Queensland.

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## Background

Delivery of malignancy related lymphoedema services including provision of compression garments in rural and remote Queensland has been difficult due to staff and skill shortages. Consumers have undertaken lengthy, expensive travel to metropolitan centres to access services. Practice redesign to provide these services locally has been driven by consumers, clinicians and allied health leaders.

## Method

Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists working in rural and remote Queensland Health facilities completed an online education package about the pathophysiology, assessment and management of lymphoedema, compression garment prescription, monitoring and care. Telehealth coaching sessions were provided by metropolitan based lymphoedema therapists and included measuring a limb and application of a garment.

## Results

Eleven rural and remote therapists reported that the online resources provided relevant and useful content. There were some technical issues accessing internet resources. Some therapists reported that the workload was heavy but this may have been related to the provision of information in multiple formats to support different learning styles.

Metropolitan therapists who provided telehealth coaching reported that the model supported competency based training and clinical skill development. Local site issues such as telehealth bandwidth were resolved during the project.

Consumers reported high levels of satisfaction with the services provided and there were no adverse events.

## Discussion

This trial indicated that online education with supportive coaching via telehealth is an acceptable method to ensure full scope of practice for generalist therapists providing lymphoedema therapy in rural and remote locations. It also provided rural and remote consumers with stabilised lymphoedema safe provision of services close to home. This is a sustainable model of education which has the capacity to address workforce and service provision issues on a continuous basis.