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The psychosocial response to lymphedema

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Lymphedema, a life-altering disease, affects many breast cancer survivors throughout the world. Manifested as either an acute or chronic illness, lymphedema can occur at any time during and following post-breast cancer treatment as the result of damaged lymph vessels. Resulting in the accumulation of protein-rich fluid in the affected limb, lymphedema inhibits the mobility of the limb and is both disabling and disfiguring. These factors ultimately result in a variety of psychosocial responses from both the patient and the family, including lowered self-esteem and depression in the patient and role modification of the family. Cultural and age factors also affect the patient's perception and understanding of the disease, further necessitating new approaches to health care practice. A preliminary content analysis of qualitative responses on impact of lymphedema following breast cancer treatment described by study participants will also be provided.

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