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Citation for final published version:

Kelly, Daniel 2022. Commentary: A qualitative systematic review and meta-aggregation of the experiences of men diagnosed with chronic lymphoedema. *Journal of Research in Nursing* 10.1177/17449871221117428

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/17449871221117428>

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Commentary

A qualitative systematic review and meta-aggregation of the experiences of men diagnosed with chronic lymphoedema

Some long-term impacts that arise as a result of cancer, trauma or other conditions have a remarkably low profile, yet cause considerable distress. For men living with chronic oedema the impact of this condition has long been poorly documented, and its impact understood only in a limited way. It certainly deserves to be subjected to greater attention by nurse researchers and other professionals who help men to live with this chronic problem. In this paper the qualitative evidence was aggregated, and, from an admittedly limited number of studies, suggested that we can understand how men with this condition strive to adjust to a new normal, whilst also seeking better sources of advice in order to adjust and accommodate the changes to their body function, and body image, as well as the impact on daily life. These impacts include intimate relationships, employment, and engagement in social life in its widest sense. This comes as no surprise to those of us who have researched men's experience of prostate cancer (Kelly 2009) as they also faced changes in all aspects of life. The findings of this systematic review also emphasises how chronic oedema can serve as a barrier to normal independent function, but also as a reminder of what has been lost and what now must be coped with. Adjustment is not always straightforward, however, as the image of chronic oedema is one that is usually linked with breast cancer, rather than being seen as a condition that also affects men.

As Alleva & Tilka (2022) argue, researching how individuals think, feel, and behave with respect to their body's functionality is essential to achieving a more complete and holistic understanding of body image. Function is a key aspect of how we judge the impact of change (such as chronic oedema) on our body. For men this will include concerns about

their role in terms of employment or in relation to other men. By questioning critically the way that body image and function are inter-related we may start to understand whether there are gendered aspects to chronic health problems that we need to understand better. By understanding we are in a better position to respond more effectively. This paper offers a starting point in terms of understanding the nature of the evidence base that currently exists around chronic oedema in men, as well as serving to remind us how much further the evidence base needs to be developed.

References

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