

Physiotherapy PD Pathway

- Physiotherapists play a key role in the care of patients with cancer across the continuum of care
- Physiotherapists have a range of roles assisting patients to manage the effects of cancer or cancer treatment, such as helping to manage lymphoedema, pain, mobility issues, musculoskeletal impairments and cardio-respiratory impairments.

"In addition to lymphoedema management, I look at pain management. I also look at musculoskeletal impairments which might be side effects of treatment, or effects of a recurrence ... Then there are mobility issues, balance and gait assessment, ADL management in terms of maintaining function and ability... A lot of my role is in carers' education and support, particularly in palliative care.... I also do a lot of work... with exercise during chemotherapy, exercise training and recovery post-treatment ... I've also been trying looking at weight management, trying to avoid weight gain during treatment and then post-treatment, at health and wellbeing generally in survivors..."

(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

- Physiotherapists practise in a variety of cancer care and palliative care settings. Find out how some Australian physiotherapists have developed their careers in these different settings.
- Professional development opportunities are available through a range of avenues, including workplace-based learning, self-directed learning, workshops and seminars, short courses, professional networks, conferences and postgraduate qualifications.

Where are you in your career?

▶ New to cancer care

If you are new to cancer care, you will probably want to start with activities that will provide you with general information about cancer, its diagnosis and treatment. Gaining experience in a broad range of areas may help you not only in your understanding of the needs of patients with cancer but also in your decisions about future career directions.

▶ Find a mentor

A mentor can be a great source of advice and support. Click here for tips on finding a mentor.

"Seek a formal mentor or recognised people – whether in your local area or more broadly – who could be resource people for you, who you could have that ongoing contact with, and develop a network with them"

(Leonie Naumann, Acting Senior Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

"Link in with someone you can ask questions of. It might be formalised, that you have a chat once a month or every couple of weeks initially... It can be someone in your hospital... or probably you can go through the bigger cancer centres... or go through the APA (to find that person)"

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

Mentors can be physiotherapists or other health professionals working in cancer care.

"It's very important to identify a mentor or mentors – and they might not necessarily just be physiotherapy ones – then have a network that you're able to call on, to reflect on things with, and also to debrief (with)..."

(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

"Even just liaising with different clinical specialists – that's almost a mentoring thing as well as keeping up to date"

(Leonie Naumann, Acting Senior Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

Mentors can help you develop your career, as well as answer clinical questions that you may have.

"Get yourself a mentor – I think that's really important. Have someone you can talk to about what you're trying to achieve and who might be able to help you achieve that – in a quiet way with a few words, or by providing some names as part of a network..."

(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

▶ Broaden your general physiotherapy skills and experience

People with cancer may present to a physiotherapist with a variety of problems that cover the broad spectrum of physiotherapy practice. Having a broad physiotherapy background is helpful in dealing with the breadth of patient groups, diseases, and areas of the body affected.

"Having a broad background can be helpful also... oncology can encompass all manner of patient groups, diseases and sites within the body, and having a broad background can be helpful"
(Leonie Naumann, Acting Senior Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

"For any new person it's very important that they develop general experience and knowledge on appropriate interventions because even though you'll develop more specific ways of working with oncology patients, you need to draw on that to optimally manage them"
(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

"Even though I'm seen as a lymphoedema therapist, people walk in with all sorts of issues. They don't just walk in with lymphoedema. They might walk in with a shoulder problem after breast cancer management, or they may come in with some sort of neurological problem... You have to deal with lots of issues... You pull on a lot of the skills that you've learned throughout your career. The physiotherapist needs good generalist skills as well as the more specific cancer skills."
(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

"You're dealing with a huge spectrum. You're dealing from the early stages where perhaps you've got a young person in her 30s who's going to go back to the gym or who flies every two weeks or who wants to do weights, to the other end of the spectrum where you've got someone who's dying..."
(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

"If there are shoulder restrictions then my general physiotherapy training kicks in..."
(Hildegard Reul-Hirche, Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

Having a broad physiotherapy background and more life experience may also help you cope with emotional demands of working in cancer care

"Having a broad background also gives you a bit of life experience ... emotionally, (cancer care) can be quite a demanding area... if you're a little older or have more experience behind you, it might mean you can perhaps cope a bit more easily... (working in cancer care) can impact people personally quite a bit..."
(Leonie Naumann, Acting Senior Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

▶ Trial a short-term role in physiotherapy cancer care
Spending some time in cancer care can help you decide whether this area of physiotherapy might be for you. This can be possible with a hospital rotation, by arranging informal visits with physiotherapists in cancer care, or by enrolling in a formal site visit program.

"If you have the opportunity, rotate in (to cancer services) and out of the area for little bit, so you have the chance to step away for a little bit... try something (in cancer care) without necessarily being locked into it"
(Leonie Naumann, Acting Senior Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

"If people want try it out, visit physiotherapists or a physiotherapy department that specialises in cancer care. Most of us (physiotherapists working in cancer care) are quite happy to have other physiotherapists come and have a chat."
(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

"There are opportunities in terms of formalised site visits... through AHPEP (The Allied Health Professional Enhancement Program, QLD), physios can do site visits to centres that specialise in cancer care ... In palliative care, ... the PEPA program (Program of Experience in the Palliative Approach) also gives people the opportunity to move into an area for a brief visit..."
(Leonie Naumann, Acting Senior Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

▶ Undertake self-directed learning on cancer terminology
In addition to physiotherapy expertise, physiotherapists working in the area need to have an understanding of the different types of cancer decisions.

"I think that's really important for allied health professionals to have an understanding of the different types of cancers and the different treatments - to have that underpinning knowledge for their clinical practice."
(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

Options may include cancer text books and cancer websites. Ask others what they have found helpful.

"I encourage (physios interested in cancer care) to get a textbook called 'Clinical Oncology'... It's a really good resource on all sorts of different types of cancers. It's my touchstone for learning and understanding about cancer and current care."

(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

You may find that information designed for patients is easier to digest when you first start learning.

"Look at some information through The Cancer Council Australia or the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre... and read it. Even if it's some of the consumer guides- it's a good way to start. It's pitched at an easy level, it's easy to read"

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

Good introductory websites include:

- National Cancer Institute 'Understanding Cancer Series' <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics>
- MacMillan Cancer Support
<http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Cancerinformation/Aboutcancer/AboutcancerHome.aspx>

For more information, [click here](#).

▶ Attend introductory workshops on relevant topics

Workshops and seminars may be available through a range of avenues. Ask colleagues about local talks being given in your hospital or local area. The Cancer Council in each state and territory often run workshop and seminars on a range of cancer topics.

For more information, [click here](#).

"We're quite fortunate that in the cancer care area there's a lot of opportunity for professional development. There have been a number of courses and seminars ... I've been able to go to a lot of those. That helps in broadening my knowledge in the area along with working clinically in the area..."

(Leonie Naumann, Acting Senior Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

▶ Find out who's who in the cancer team

Multidisciplinary care is becoming a fundamental part of the delivery of best practice in cancer care.

"Link in with a multidisciplinary team (group). If you're in a hospital, get involved and go to those (multidisciplinary team) meetings, because that's a good way to start – you do get a well-rounded understanding of the whole picture. You just can't work in isolation in cancer care."

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

Being a member of a multidisciplinary team can be a valuable source of information and can provide ongoing learning opportunities.

"Over time I developed some very strong collegiate relationships with colleagues in other disciplines who really fostered that (cancer care-specific) knowledge and were very welcoming of a physiotherapist in their team.... Being able to collaborate with colleagues and participate in multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary teams (is important)"

(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

"I worked for a breast unit ... the most I learned about breast cancer was through their multidisciplinary meetings... I just learned so much. Just looking at mammograms, understanding them, understanding the whole regime, the side effects, various treatment options and being involved in that process and being seen as a valued member of a cancer team."

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

"Overall, what is really important is a network of colleagues... in the breast cancer rehab area, I attend the breast clinic... Whenever I have a question (and in the beginning there were lots of questions) I tried to ask the right person whenever it was appropriate. The breast surgeons were there, the breast nurse was there ..."

(Hildegard Reul-Hirche, Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

"Just talking with various colleagues, and (regarding) particular patients – consulting with and liaising with their medical team at that time in terms of medical management"

(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

"My learning in the area of cancer was enhanced by learning from my colleagues, from the multidisciplinary meeting. There is a great deal of support... especially when they go through all the different cases... (The meetings) gave me an opportunity to meet the other health professionals..."

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

"The best multidisciplinary meetings I've ever been to are those that actually involve you as a physiotherapist. They say ... 'this person has a specific sport they play – how are we going to get them involved in that?'. That's a great way to be part of the team."

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

Involvement in multidisciplinary teams will not be possible for many physiotherapists, particularly those in private practice. Developing your own networks with clinicians in other disciplines is therefore particularly important.

"Being in private practice, I don't actually get to participate in multidisciplinary teams now... I find I rely heavily on colleagues at (a large tertiary hospital) ... as well as (the knowledge) I get with individual patients when I correspond with their medical team" (Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer) "Whether its through courses you go to, conferences, or the multidisciplinary meetings or the numerous other educational opportunities, the outcome is you build up a network which is really valuable and assists you when you are providing care for those with cancer... it was really important for me once I'd moved out of the public sector and I was in private practice (where I was more isolated)"

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

"Here in Australia, physiotherapists working in cancer care tend to be fairly isolated... that's why it's important that we engage through other disciplines in palliative and oncological care..."

(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

To access the Cancer Learning Multidisciplinary Toolkit, [click here](#).

▶ Join a relevant interest group or organisation

Involvement in local, state-based, national or international networks or special interest groups can be a valuable source of information, ongoing learning and support. Ask colleagues about local groups.

"Link with a group. For instance, the physiotherapists at Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute have put together a cancer group – they run lecture series, seminars on various topics."

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

For more information about national and international groups, [click here](#).

▶ Taking the next step

If you are considering working in a cancer-specific role, you will benefit from building your cancer-related knowledge and practice-based experience. This may involve attending courses and conferences, undertaking self-directed learning, getting involved in professional networks and groups, and pursuing opportunities to work in physiotherapy cancer care services within or outside your workplace.

▶ Build your experience

Seek and take advantage of all opportunities as they arise. Make your interest known within your workplace, talk with other physiotherapists working in the cancer area, attend conferences, accept a position with rotations in cancer care, or seek opportunities outside your current workplace.

"It's about accessing people and networks and conferences where you can find them – it may not necessarily be specifically discipline related for physiotherapy"

(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

Identify the type of cancer care experience you want.

"Identify whether you want a broad oncology experience or to start focussed and then broaden out into other areas, which is what I did... I started in breast cancer and then (my expertise in cancer care) has grown from that. But I also had the cardio-respiratory background, which relates to cancer patients who may have treatment side-effects..."

(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

Build your practice-based experience, with guidance from more experienced physiotherapists.

"I did on the job training with other people ... and that developed (my) special interest in the area."

(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

"I fell into cancer care ... I learned a lot on the job, from the other physiotherapists around me"

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

Opportunities may present in other ways, such as giving presentations at consumer forums.

"Talking at cancer support meetings, about lymphoedema, getting back to normal activities – it makes you keep up to date and you can learn a great deal from the audience you are presenting to"
(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

▶ Get involved in networks and groups

Involvement in local, state-based, national or international networks or special interest groups can be a valuable source of information and ongoing learning.

At an international level, the World Confederation of Physical Therapists is developing a cancer interest group.

"At the last conference of the World Confederation of Physical Therapists we had a meeting of physiotherapists from around the world who are interested in cancer care and palliative care... I expect that group will take off..."
(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

At a national level, organisations such as the Australasian Lymphology Association (ALA) provide opportunities for networking with others.

"Through my work with the ALA, I have a wide network of health professionals who work in the field of lymphoedema nationally, and we stay in contact via email"
(Hildegard Reul-Hirche, Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

For more information about national and international groups, [click here](#).

There are many local interest groups. Ask colleagues about local groups.

"There's a Lymphoedema therapist interest group here which is an informal group that meets once every two months of physios, OTs, nurses ... who are working in the lymphoedema area. We meet and we have guest speakers, or have discussions... and conference reports from the different people who've (attended) different conferences... I think most states have something similar... The Cancer Council of Queensland has an Allied Health Professionals Education Group which provides education opportunities"
(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

"It was a matter of getting a network going because you just need support... We formed an interest group here which then helped us to exchange not only case studies, but also information... articles, books we were all in the same boat – we were all learning, learning from each other and that spilled over into ringing each other if we had a problem in between meetings..."
(Hildegard Reul-Hirche, Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

Becoming actively involved in networks and organisations provides additional opportunities for learning and networking.

"I became highly involved in the Australasian Lymphology Association... I have an active role in various subcommittees. That has helped with networking and to gain more knowledge by talking to people who have a lot more experience..."
(Hildegard Reul-Hirche, Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

Learning from online discussion groups is an advantage of special interest groups

"I belong to a lymphoedema email discussion group. Someone will email a question that talks about a clinical problem and asks what ideas people have – we all see it and people respond"
(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

▶ Attend conferences

Attendance at relevant state-based, national or international conferences can be helpful for building both knowledge and networks. For conference listings, [click here](#).

"I know what's coming up in the next 12-18 months and identify things that are of interest to attend and plan towards that... If I can attend it, I go"
(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

"Conferences that helped me included the COSA conference, to get that broad cancer knowledge. The Australasian Lymphology Conference provides me with an opportunity to stay up to date in the area of lymphoedema management."

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

"At the beginning I attended the COSA conferences purely to get that general cancer care knowledge— a wider knowledge in different areas of cancer care - that was very helpful."

(Hildegard Reul-Hirche, Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

"I try to go World Conference in Physiotherapy which is developing more and more an oncology stream ... And certainly the last time we had two days within a four-day program that had sessions related to oncology and lymphoedema"

(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

"Now there is more access for allied health professionals to information about cancer care and palliative care – there are a lot more professional development opportunities for people who are interested. I'd encourage anyone who wants to pursue this area of practice that they try and get themselves to whatever opportunities are out there. That might also mean interdisciplinary opportunities such as going to nursing and cancer conferences as well as medical conferences etc."

(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

▶ Attend workshops and short courses

Workshops and courses can help you develop networks as well as expertise. For more information about cancer-specific workshops and courses, [click here](#).

"The Cancer Council Queensland has run a number of update courses and lecture evenings... one I went to was on gynaecology where they ran a series of weekly lectures over a four-week period where you went for two or three hours once a week..."

(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

"What would be really helpful would be doing a lymphoedema course ... Treatment for cancer may cause risk for lymphoedema and it's really helpful and important to be able to assess for this..."

(Leonie Naumann, Acting Senior Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

"The lymphoedema courses are multidisciplinary... that's fantastic because you then build up a whole group of people who can assist you... you can get a lot of mentoring through these type of courses. They're always there to answer questions... After the course is finished therapists are only a phone call or an email away to assist and guide the new lymphoedema practitioner. I didn't have that when I first started... It's a really good thing that we can support each other"

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

"I did a pelvic floor course, which was run through the Australian Physiotherapy Association, largely because ... radiation on pelvic masses can have an impact on the pelvic floor"

(Leonie Naumann, Acting Senior Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

▶ Undertake self-directed learning in your area of interest

Once you have a general understanding of cancer, the next step is to build detailed, specific knowledge.

"If you have access through your hospital library electronic journal databases, that's a good place to start. Ask the librarian for some assistance in putting together some search terms... whatever (you) have an interest in, in relation to treatment or management of cancer or symptomology..." (Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer

"I regularly try and search the literature for relevant information on clinical questions that come up"

(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

Asking other physiotherapists and specialists is a good way to build your knowledge

"Get in contact with the physiotherapy staff or allied health staff in the major cancer care institution in your state because they'll often be able to put you in contact with either other individuals or databases of information that might be relevant to your area of practice"

(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

A range of sources of information are available including websites, journals, textbooks, and interactive CD-ROMs. Clinical practice guidelines are available for a range of cancer types. For more information, [click here](#).

▶ Think about training in non-clinical skills

In addition to your cancer skills and knowledge, you may also identify other general skills that will help you in your role. Training may include communication skills training or presentation skills training.

For more information, [click here](#).

► Think about your own self-care

While rewarding, working in cancer care can also be challenging emotionally and psychologically.

"It's challenging emotionally... You have that relationship (with patients), you get to know them. They often offload, especially if they've gone past that initial cancer management phase where they've had a lot of intensive involvement with their oncologist, their breast care nurse etc, then ... you're the next person they're seeing the most..."

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

"If you're starting to feel that you're the only person who can do this, or there's no-one else who can help you, or you're getting a bit ratty or irritated, or your communication with people is not the same as it used to be, or your responses within the clinical situation are not to the level that you'd expect them to be... If you've got to the point psychologically that you can't do what you would normally do, that is a big sign of issues and problems and you need to seek some formal help... and perhaps seek some time out..."

(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

"It's good that you can help patients, but you've also got to realise that you've got to be able to look after yourself and offload as well"

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

"It's pretty difficult when you've learned about somebody's death or it comes as a surprise to you when you learn about (their death) third hand... it can be difficult to understand your own responses to that... team meetings are a really good place to have a discussion about where patients are at, what's happening with them, and to know if they've passed on."

(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

There are many strategies you can use to help you deal with the emotional and psychological stress of working in cancer care and to help avoid burn-out.

"While it is a very positive area to work in and a very gratifying area to work in, one has to be realistic ... you need, very early on, to identify strategies for how they are going to deal with that, to avoid burnout, and to have collegiate support to deal with that..."

(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

"Don't try and be all things to everybody... If you're working in the area of cancer care, that's already a draining area of practice, quite a stressful area of practice. If you're trying to do other things over and above that, that are also stressful, it can lead to burn-out"

(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

"Sometimes you need to debrief... I think networking is wonderful in that regard... you find people with whom you can talk one-on-one about your frustrations or the grief you experience because you've lost patients ... so you have that support as well..."

(Hildegard Reul-Hirche, Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

"Have a team around you, whether formally or informally, to debrief with ... that goes for any of us, no matter how experienced or otherwise we are"

(Leonie Naumann, Acting Senior Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

"Peer support is really important. If you have trained peer supporters in your area of practice, then try to access them... If that's not available, I've found it handy to keep in contact with the social worker in my area of practice – it may simply be a case of a small debrief at the end of the day or just having a cup of coffee and relaxing and winding down. I've always found the pastoral care workers really useful to have a chat to..."

(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

"If it's been a really difficult situation, then I've talked to colleagues or other health professionals like psychologists who I know might assist. I'm pretty good at letting go of that sort of emotional burden – my family life, my husband helps."

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

"It's really important to have a work-life balance. For me that meant keeping up exercise and making sure I didn't get embedded full-time in my clinical work – that I would actually take time out for morning tea and have a lunch... touch base with people who are working outside of the area to get some normalcy in your life... get some exercise, get a massage... whatever you need..."

(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

An important aspect of training for physiotherapists working in cancer care is self-care. To access a list of self-care resources, [click here](#).

▶ Advanced practice

If you are working at or considering moving into an advanced role in cancer care, your professional development needs will be more specific.

▶ Participate in research, projects and steering committees

Involvement in practice-based research, projects and steering committees can help build your expertise.

"I identified that cancer care was an area that didn't receive focus in physiotherapy...From what was published and available in textbooks, I developed what I thought should be an appropriate physiotherapy program... From that clinical exposure and evaluating treatment effects and outcomes with patients, I then decided to do formal outcome studies which lead me to doing a PhD in the area..."

(Dr Robyn Box, Private Practitioner & University Lecturer)

"The [NBOCC Lymphoedema](#) initiative...evidence review – was a great way to keep up to date for me - I was on the Steering Committee for that. Involvement from that angle is important for health professionals. You get involved, you learn a lot and stay up to date..."

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

"I was a research assistant for... breast cancer rehabilitation research... to guide patients after their surgery with exercises to regain pre-operative shoulder movement, without increasing the risk of lymphoedema..."

(Hildegard Reul-Hirche, Physiotherapist, large tertiary hospital)

"Get on committees. Take the plunge. Even if you don't know something, you'll learn something... There's so much you learn by being a member of committees"

(Maree O'Connor, Private Practitioner)

▶ Give presentations or get involved in organising relevant state-based or national conferences

Giving presentations at national and international conferences can help you learn while also sharing knowledge with others. Being involved in the organising committees for conferences can be rewarding and can help you develop new networks. For conference listings, [click here](#).

▶ Undertake relevant postgraduate qualifications

At present there are no specific postgraduate qualifications available in Australia in physiotherapy and cancer care. However, the Australasian Lymphology Association is currently developing a postgraduate certificate in the management of lymphoedema.

Alternatively, you may choose to focus research-based degrees in the area of cancer care, through a Masters degree, a PhD or a Doctorate of Clinical Physiotherapy.

"Set yourself some goals about what you want to do and where you want to go and give yourself the best opportunity to do that... by perhaps up-skilling in areas of research training, for example. A PhD is a great way to do that. There are now professional doctorates through which you can do that as well"

(Dr Liisa Laakso, Senior University Lecturer)

The Australasian Lymphology Association is currently developing an educational package about lymphoedema for incorporation into university-based courses in the coming years. For more information, [click here](#).

▶ Undertake training in leadership and mentoring skills

In addition to your cancer skills and knowledge, you may also identify other general skills that will help you in your role. For more information, [click here](#).

▶ Case studies

Find out what physiotherapists do in cancer care, what they enjoy about their work, and how they have built their careers in cancer care:

▶ Hildegard Reul-Hirche is a physiotherapist at a large tertiary hospital with responsibility for lymphoedema services and physiotherapy for breast cancer rehabilitation

Role	Physiotherapist at a large tertiary hospital in Brisbane with responsibility for:
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lymphoedema services (90-95% cancer-related) • Physiotherapy for breast cancer rehabilitation including pre- and post-surgery assessments focussing on shoulder movement and early detection of lymphoedema
Links	<p>Special interests in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimising the risk of and managing lymphoedema • Guiding patients back to their usual activities including exercising after treatment for cancer
The positives	<p><i>"I grew into it and I really liked it. It was really satisfying and challenging I... Every person is different – there is the severity of the lymphoedema, there is the underlying cause, there is the age, the ability of the patient, distance ..."</i></p> <p><i>"(I like) the contact with the patient... working with a patient throughout that intensive phase, you get to know that person... you can just 'be there' for the patient... patients are very appreciative... You can make a difference"</i></p>
Pathway	<p>'Stumbled' into a lymphoedema management role about 18 years ago</p> <p>Initially learned from immediate colleagues then undertook a 2 week training course in lymphoedema management</p> <p>Awarded scholarship for study and exposure to lymphoedema management centres overseas</p> <p>Established a lymphoedema interest group/ network</p> <p>Furthered career through research role in breast cancer rehabilitation</p>
Training and courses	<p>Training course in lymphoedema management developed by Drs Casley-Smith</p> <p>Training course at the Földi Klinik, Germany and observation at Vodder School in Walchsee,, Austria</p> <p>Advanced & Review Course at Foeldi Clinic, Hinterzarten, Germany to up skill and develop international networks opportunities</p>
Groups and networks	<p>Member of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COSA • Australasian Lymphology Association • International Society of Lymphology • Allied Health Professionals Education Group, The Cancer Council QLD • Australian Physiotherapist Association
What helps?	<p>Having broad, non-cancer-specific physiotherapy skills and experience</p> <p>Reading widely</p> <p>Attending conferences</p> <p>Becoming actively involved with professional organisations</p> <p>Establishing and maintaining local and international networks with colleagues across disciplines</p> <p>Attending and presenting at training courses</p>

	Getting involved in research roles
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▶ Leonie Naumann is relatively new to cancer care and is currently an acting senior physiotherapist at a large tertiary hospital

Role	Acting senior physiotherapist at a large tertiary hospital in Brisbane with responsibility for overseeing ambulatory and outpatient physiotherapy services in cancer care
Links	<p>Special interest in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lymphoedema • prostate cancer • burns • cross-cultural training of health professionals
The positives	<i>"I see people at varying stages of their disease course, from diagnosis to palliation. Each patient has a different set of problems (and challenges) to manage. I appreciate getting to know each person and sharing their cancer journey, while seeking to improve their physical function and quality of life."</i>
Pathway	<p>Approximately 15 years in rotational physiotherapy roles in the hospital setting, with significant experience in cardio-respiratory and burns wards and amputee management</p> <p>Took up opportunity for role in cancer care approximately 18 months ago, started acting in senior physiotherapy role in cancer care about 12 months later</p> <p><i>"Opportunities that have fallen in my direction!... – I have taken those opportunities as they've come up"</i></p>
Training and courses	<p>Basic 7 day course in lymphoedema management, QLD</p> <p>Advanced 5 day course in lymphoedema management, QLD</p> <p>2-day palliative care course (primarily for nurses, but multidisciplinary) run by the hospital</p> <p>Australian Physiotherapy Association Pelvic floor course</p> <p>ALA Conference</p> <p>Numerous short courses on cancer-related clinical issues</p> <p>Advancing Key Initiatives in Cancer Care conference, Qld Health</p>
Groups and networks	<p>Member of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COSA • Lymphoedema Therapists Interest Group, Brisbane • Allied Health Professionals Education Group, Cancer Council QLD
What helps?	<p>Having a broad physiotherapy background</p> <p>Trialling a short-term cancer care role</p> <p>Making the most of any opportunities that arise</p> <p>Attending relevant training courses and conferences</p> <p>Establishing mentors and joining networks and interest groups</p> <p>Liaising with other people in equivalent roles in other hospitals</p> <p>Undertaking research roles</p>

▶ Liisa Laakso is a Senior Lecturer in physiotherapy, with special interests in cancer care and palliative care, at Griffith University

Role	Senior Lecturer, School of Physiotherapy and Exercise Science, Griffith University, with responsibilities for academia, teaching, research and administration. Currently on sabbatical, devoting time to cancer-related research
Links	<i>"My interest is about symptom management... I'm interested in the effects of exercise in patients with cancer, the effect of physical activity with patients who are in the palliative stage of cancer... effects of laser therapy for pain... laser therapy for lymphoedema"</i>
Why like it?	<p><i>"There are things that physiotherapists can really help with for improving patients' quality of life ... and potentially also survivability...I think that physical activity - exercise - goes hand in hand with emotional and psychological wellbeing. If you put the two of those together you see that patients have more control over their lives and they can deal better with their diagnosis and prognosis."</i></p> <p><i>"I would encourage any physiotherapist to work in the field of cancer care. It can be a very rewarding field, it's a field in which physiotherapists have got an enormous role to play"</i></p>
Pathway	<p>Interest in cancer care started with an experience with a particular patient as a student physiotherapist approximately 25 years ago</p> <p>Worked clinically in palliative care and cancer care for many years</p> <p>Undertook self-directed learning to develop knowledge and skills in palliative care and cancer care</p> <p>About 12 years into career, also became involved in an academic teaching role (while also working clinically), with a particular interest in how physiotherapy students are taught about issues of cancer care and of grief, loss, death and dying.</p> <p>Currently is in a full time academic teaching role</p>
Training and courses	<p>PhD with a focus on chronic pain and laser therapy</p> <p>Graduate Certificate in Health Management</p>
Groups and networks	<p>Member of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) (affiliated with World Confederation of Physical Therapy – WCPT) • Australasian Lymphology Association (ALA) • Allied Health Professionals Oncology Group, Cancer Council Queensland • Reviewer: Journal of Palliative Care; Australian Journal of Physiotherapy; Lasers in Surgery and Medicine journal • Editorial Board, Brazilian Journal of Physical Therapy • APA Educator's Group National committee, and Queensland Chair • WCPT International Society of Physiotherapy Educators (ISPA) • WCPT International Society for Electrophysical Agents (ISEPA) and invited membership of "The International Electrophysical Agents Standards Committee" (IEPASC) • Electrophysical Agents (EPAs) Network (an on-line network of physiotherapists interested in EPAs) • Australian Medical Laser Association (AMLA) – Vice-President • World Association for Laser Therapy • The Menzies Scholars Association • APA Cardio-thoracic Special Group • APA Sports Physiotherapy Special Group

What helps?	<p>Regular literature searches</p> <p>Subscribing to journals, journal alerts, other electronic searches</p> <p>Learning about the different types of cancers and current treatments</p> <p>Having a mentor</p> <p>Joining local and international associations, networks and interest groups</p> <p>Networking with physiotherapists and professionals in other disciplines working in cancer care and palliative care</p> <p>Establishing strong support networks with colleagues</p> <p>Keeping a work-life balance, with regular steps outside the work environment, to ensure self-care</p> <p>Setting yourself realistic goals</p> <p><i>"Set yourself some goals about what you want to do and where you want to go and give yourself the best opportunity to do that... but be careful about how much you bite off to chew... Don't try and be all things to everybody..."</i></p> <p><i>"If you're going to work in the area of cancer care, make sure you get lots of information about what you're moving into, get good support from individuals around you, and know that you can make a difference to patients in this area of practice"</i></p>
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► Maree O'Connor is a private practitioner providing physiotherapy services for people with lymphoedema (primarily cancer-related)

Role	Private practitioner providing physiotherapy services for people with lymphoedema (primarily cancer-related)
Links	Special interest in lymphoedema management
Why like it	<p><i>"I've had just as much satisfaction in helping the early intervention side, as I've had helping someone who's had a better quality of death."</i></p> <p><i>"I think it's to make a difference ... to a person's quality of life..."</i></p>
Pathway	<p>Fell into a physiotherapy role in cancer services over 15 years ago. Since then has worked in public and private hospitals, with involvement in establishing a lymphoedema clinic and working in a breast unit</p> <p>Started working concurrently in private practice, then slowly focussed more and more on private practice</p> <p><i>"I found I enjoyed it when I started to work in the area of cancer, and the lymphoedema management aspect was a neglected area and when I found out more about it I thought 'mm this is quite interesting – always up for a challenge!' so that's how I started in lymphoedema"</i></p>
Training and courses	<p>Training course in lymphoedema management developed by Dr Casley-Smith, offered through the Lymphoedema Association of Australia</p> <p>Vodder training course in lymphoedema – one month course in Austria, plus visit to the Földi clinic</p> <p><i>"Really you don't need to (go overseas for training) now because here in Victoria – and in other states – there are excellent courses that are run by different organisations ... from the basics of lymphoedema treatment to more advanced management..."</i></p>
Groups and	Member of:

networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lymphoedema Practitioners Education Group , Victoria • Australasian Lymphology Association • International Society of Lymphology • Australian Physiotherapy Association • Breast Cancer Network Australia • Lymphoedema Association of Victoria
What helps?	<p>Attending conferences (general cancer, specific lymphoedema/ lymphology, and consumer conferences)</p> <p>Reviewing relevant literature, texts and websites</p> <p>Having a mentor</p> <p>Getting involved in running training courses and regular updates for participants – such as</p> <p>Involvement in multidisciplinary professional networks</p> <p>Learning from colleagues</p> <p>Talking at cancer support meetings and with consumers/ patients</p> <p>Joining email discussion groups and online forums</p> <p>Becoming involved in steering committees</p> <p>Becoming involved in developing courses – ensures you keep up to date</p> <p>Trialling work in cancer care for a short period initially</p>

▶ Robyn Box is a private practitioner providing physiotherapy services for cancer and lymphoedema patients and works part time as a Senior Lecturer for the University of Queensland

Role	Private sole practitioner providing physiotherapy services for cancer patients, with a special interest in lymphoedema and oncology rehabilitation. Additional role in research and teaching as Senior Lecturer with the University of Queensland.
Links	
The positives	<i>"I make a difference"</i>
Pathway	<p>Initial background in cardio-respiratory physiotherapy – worked in acute management of cancer patients, with exposure to palliative care, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy</p> <p>Six years into career, identified oncology as an area poorly serviced by physiotherapy</p> <p>Sought information about physiotherapy interventions to develop physiotherapy rehabilitation and intervention programs, which lead into own clinical research via PhD</p> <p><i>"(I looked at breast cancer patients and thought) at the time of breast cancer surgery, surely we can start looking at shoulder rehabilitation and trying to prevent lymphoedema and get involved early"</i></p>
Training and courses	<p>PhD evaluating a physiotherapy management care plan developed to optimise shoulder movement recovery and minimise the development of lymphoedema in women recovering from breast cancer surgery</p> <p>Basic and Advanced courses in Lymphoedema Management</p> <p>Undergraduate Physiotherapy degree</p>

Groups and networks	Member of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a local Queensland Lymphoedema Therapist Interest Group • Allied Health Professionals Education Group, The Cancer Council QLD • Australian Physiotherapist Association
What helps?	Attending local, national and international conferences Regularly searching and reviewing relevant literature Reviewing relevant websites Initial 'on-the-job' training with a physiotherapist experienced in cancer care Guest-lecturing for courses in lymphoedema management and for other forums involving consumers and health professionals Attending update courses run by The Cancer Council Talking with colleagues and patients and liaising with the medical team Undertaking research Identifying courses and conferences coming up in the next 12-18 months, and planning to towards attending those of most interest

Conference/event listings

▶ Australian

COSA

<http://www.cosa.org.au/asm.html>

The Australasian Lymphology Association

<http://lymphology.asn.au/content/view/34/58/>

▶ International

World Physical Therapy (World Confederation of Physical Therapy)

<http://www.wcpt.org/congress/>

British Lymphology Society, UK

<http://www.thebls.com/conference/index.php>

National Lymphedema Network, USA

<http://www.lymphnet.org>

MASCC (the Multinational Association for Supportive Care in Cancer)/ ISOO Symposium on Supportive Care in Cancer

<http://www.mascc.org/>

International Society of Lymphology Congress

<http://www.lymphology2009.com/default.html>

ASCO (the American Society of Clinical Oncology)

<http://www.asco.org/ASCOv2/Meetings/Calendar+of+Events>

ASH (American Society of Haematology)

<http://www.hematology.org/meetings/>

San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium

<http://www.sabcs.org/>

Organisations and networks

▶ Australian

The Australian Physiotherapy Association

<http://www.physiotherapy.asn.au/>

The Australasian Lymphology Association

<http://www.lymphology.asn.au/>

The National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre (NBOCC)

<http://www.nbocc.org.au>

▶ International

International Society of Lymphology

<http://www.u.arizona.edu/~witte/ISL.htm>

The Multinational Association of Supportive Care in Cancer (MASCC)

<http://www.mascc.org/>

Courses and workshops

▶ Postgraduate qualifications

At present there are no specific postgraduate qualifications available in Australia in physiotherapy and cancer care. However, the Australasian Lymphology Association is currently developing a postgraduate certificate in lymphoedema management.

Alternatively, you may choose to focus research-based degrees in the area of cancer care, through a Masters degree, a PhD or a Doctorate of Clinical Physiotherapy.

▶ Other cancer-specific courses

Lymphoedema Management Courses – Level I (Basic) and Level II (Advanced)

Private courses run by physiotherapists with skills and expertise in managing lymphoedema:

Michael Mason, SA - <http://www.lymphoedema.com.au/>

Brenda Lee, Mt Wilga Priv. Hosp, NSW

Hildegard Reul-Hirche, QLD

Maree O'Connor, VIC

See the [Australia and New Zealand National Lymphoedema Practitioners Register \(NLPR\)](#) for contact details of other practitioners and trainers.

Casley-Smith Method for Complex Lymphatic Therapy

<http://www.lymphoedema.org.au/course.html>

Course details available through the Lymphoedema Association of Australia

Vodder School courses

<http://vodderschool.com/student/course/search/therapist>

The Vodder School is a North American-based organisation that provides education for health professionals in the original Dr. Vodder method of Manual Lymph Drainage and Combined Decongestive Therapy. The school regularly runs courses based in Australia

Földi Clinic courses

<http://www.klosetraining.com/>

In partnership with the Földi Clinic, Germany, Klose Training and Consulting runs English-speaking Lymphoedema Therapy Certification Courses (based in Germany)

▶ Workshops and seminars

The Cancer Council WA

<http://www.cancerwa.asn.au/professionals/>

Professional Development Program

The Cancer Council Queensland

http://www.cancerqld.org.au/page/Need_support/Education_Programs/AHPOG

Allied Health Professionals Oncology Group Forums

The Cancer Council Victoria

http://www.cancervic.org.au/about-cancer/for-health-professionals/training_courses_and_education

Short courses in Victoria on:

- Breast Health
- Communication
- Sexuality and cancer
- Living with cancer facilitator education

▶ Non-clinical skills

National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre

<http://www.nbocc.org.au/health-professionals/clinical-best-practice/communication-skills>

Communication skills

Self-directed learning

▶ Online resources

Cancer Learning

<http://www.cancerlearning.gov.au/>

Interactive learning modules on:

- Multidisciplinary care
- Psychosocial care

Links to cancer education resources across a broad range of areas.

EdCaN learning resources

Case studies: http://www.cancerlearning.gov.au/edcan_resources/#/xml/module_3/casestudies/

Supporting modules:

- [The cancer journey and domains of specialist cancer nursing practice](#)
- [Population health concepts in cancer control](#)
- [The biology of cancer](#)
- [Cancer treatments:](#)
 - - Fundamentals of cancer surgery
 - - Fundamentals of radiotherapy for cancer
 - - Fundamentals of systemic cancer therapies
 - - Fundamentals of cancer biological and molecular targeted therapies
 - - Fundamentals of haematopoietic stem cell transplant
- [Supportive care](#)
- Culture-centred approach in cancer control for Indigenous Australians - coming soon

The Cancer Council NSW

<http://www.cancerCouncil.com.au/editorial.asp?pageid=671>

Resources on:

- Cancer awareness (for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers)
- Talking about sexuality, body image and cancer
- Managing cancer pain

The National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre

<http://www.nbocc.org.au>

Resources on:

- Managing lymphoedema
- Clinical practice guidelines

Clinician's Health Channel

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/clinicians/>

For health professionals in Victoria – provided by the Department of Human Services

Cancer Institute NSW eviQ Cancer Treatments Online

<https://www.eviq.org.au/>

National Cancer Institute

<http://www.cancer.gov/>

USA based website – includes information for consumers and health professionals about different cancers and treatment options, including complementary medicines.

British Columbia Cancer Agency

<http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/default.htm>

Canadian based website – includes information for consumers and health professionals, including management protocols by disease state.

National Comprehensive Cancer Network

<http://www.nccn.org/>

USA based website that includes clinical guidelines for cancer treatment.

Multinational Association for the Supportive Care in Cancer

<http://www.mascc.org/>

International multidisciplinary website includes links to clinical practice guidelines in supportive care.

Grants/fellowships/scholarships

▶ Australian

Cancer Institute NSW

http://www.cancerinstitute.org.au/cancer_inst/profes/scholarships.html

education scholarships

COSA

<http://www.cosa.org.au/about-us/general-grants.html>

fellowships, grants and awards available for members

The Cancer Council Queensland

http://www.cancerqld.org.au/page/Need_support/Education_Programs/AHPOG

Allied Health Professional Oncology Group Continuing Education Grants

Check hospitals/area health services for local grant availability

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