

GERMAN SOCIETY OF LYMPHOLOGY

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The German Society of Lymphology (DGL) has existed since 1976, developing as an offshoot from the Society for Manual Lymph Drainage (Dr Vodder) and Related Therapies (GfMLV) that was founded in 1967. It is a membership organisation, recognised as a non-profit society. The goal of the society is to promote research and teaching in the field of lymphology. The DGL works with professional organisations, government agencies, health organisations, support groups, patient organisations and other medical societies both nationally and internationally. Since 1999, the three independent German-speaking societies, have re-established links to support one another and drive forward awareness and education of lymphoedema.

Key words

Manual lymphatic drainage (MLD)

Raising awareness

Cross-professional membership
Research

The Society for Manual Lymph Drainage (Dr Vodder) and Related Therapies (GfMLV) was founded in Essen, Germany, at the initiative of G. Wittlinger, Dr Vodder, and Dr Asdonk on 27 May, 1967. Three years later (1970), an advisory council was appointed, whose members were Professor Kuhnke, a physiologist in Bonn, Professor Mislin, a physiologist in Mainz and Professor Földi, an internist in Salzgitter.

The first three meetings took place in Essen. Subsequent venues were Munich and Saig im Schwarzwald. After the annual meeting in 1973 in Hamburg, an 'Austrian section' was established within the society.

In 1974, based on positive results in specialised lymphoedema clinics, manual lymphatic drainage (MLD) was officially recognised in Germany as being an effective treatment for lymphoedema provided by the national

health schemes. However, health schemes made reimbursement of MLD contingent on the therapists having undergone thorough training. MLD training is regulated by the German Government (Department of Health) and supervised by the social insurance companies. Guidelines for teaching content, details of oral and written exams were prepared by the involved groups and societies and published in 1997. The length of lymph drainage courses was extended from two to four weeks. Since 1997, health schemes have required 170 training units of 45 minutes each.

1975 saw a secession of the Austrian section of the society due to differences in opinion regarding training requirements.

On 23 October, 1976, the German section of the Society for Manual Lymph Drainage (Dr Vodder) was renamed the German Society of Lymphology (DGL). This date marks the foundation of the society. Its role was to:

- ▶▶ Promote experimental and clinical research in lymphology
- ▶▶ Promote special training in lymphoedema diagnosis and treatment
- ▶▶ Distribute research results (journal of the society, internet)
- ▶▶ Cooperate with other scientific medical societies and organisations
- ▶▶ Establish working groups (e.g. dermatology, traumatology, immunology, neurology,

lymphoedema treatment, lymphatic imaging, lipoedema)

- ▶▶ Organise congresses and post-graduate courses
- ▶▶ Support lymphoedema networks.

The key founding members were Dr Asdonk (general practitioner), Professor Gregl (radiologist), Dr Clodius (surgeon), Professor Földi (internist), and Professor Kuhnke (physiologist). Professor Földi and Professor Kuhnke were elected to the positions of president and secretary general, respectively. The first annual congress took place in 1977 in Feldberg in association with the Austrian society. This event succeeded in raising awareness and improving knowledge of the lymph vascular system, diagnosis and treatment. Afterwards, the two societies went their separate ways until 2000.

The end of the cooperation between Dr Asdonk and Professor Földi (1978–1981) in the Feldbergklinik led to Professor Földi's resignation from the DGL in 1981. In 1985, Professor Földi and other scientists founded the Society of German-speaking Lymphologists (GDL), which has organised its own lymphology congresses on a biannual basis since 1987.

The GDL's membership comprises physicians only (approximately 150 members). In contrast, the 920 members of the DGL include physicians, physiotherapists,

cosmeticians (26), and medical supply staff (5), all of whom have equal rights (to vote, change the constitution, elect board members, discuss annual reports, etc). However, it is now possible to be a member of all three societies (GDL, DGL and the Austrian society) at a reduced fee to each society. This helps to promote closer cooperation of the professionals involved in the treatment of patients with oedema.

The international nature of the DGL is attested to by the fact that 90 of its members are from Switzerland, 40 from the Netherlands, 36 from Austria, eight from the United States, four from the United Kingdom and one from South Africa.

In 1995, Professor Weissleder, (radiologist) and Dr Schuchhardt (internist) and later, Dr Brauer, (radiologist and nuclear medicine specialist), were recruited by the DGL to run the journal and organise special training programmes, meetings and congresses and to establish and coordinate contact with the other societies. This brought about an enormous boost in the quality of the journal for the society.

The DGL logo, symbolising the relationship of the blood and lymph systems, was designed by Dr Herpertz in 1996 (Figure 1).

With Professor Horst Weissleder as chief intermediary, contact with the Austrian Society was restored. In 1999,



Figure 1. Logo of the German Society of Lymphology (DGL).

the DGL and the Society for Manual Lymph Drainage (Dr Vodder) and Related Therapies (GfMLV) signed a cooperation agreement, while retaining their respective independence. One year later, after 23 years of separation, a joint congress was held. Since then, joint congresses have taken place every two years.

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For Dr Asdonk, the opportunity to experience this reunification before his death in 2003 was a great pleasure.

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The official journal of the society was published twice a year as the *Zeitschrift für Lymphologie (Journal for Lymphology)* from 1977 to 1997 by Schattauer Verlag in Stuttgart. Since 1997, it has been published by Viavital Verlag in Essen as *Lymphologie in Forschung und Praxis (Lymphology in Research and Practice) (LymphForsch)*. It is now also the official publication of the GfMLV (1999) and the GDL (2006). As such, *LymphForsch* serves as a link between the three lymphological societies, being the only German-language periodical devoted to lymphology.

The website of the DGL (www.dglymph.de) was established in 2004. It is an accessible, user-friendly platform that provides a wealth of information for physicians, therapists and patients. While it is in German, journal abstracts are published in German and English. Currently, more than 50,000 visits to the site are registered per year.

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Key points

- ▶▶ The goal of the society is to promote research and teaching in the field of lymphology.
- ▶▶ In 1999, the DGL and the Society for Manual Lymph Drainage (Dr Vodder) and Related Therapies (GfMLV) signed a cooperation agreement, while retaining their respective independence.
- ▶▶ The DGL is a dynamic, open-minded, tolerant society, where everyone's voice/opinion is heard. Its cross-professional membership serves to keep it abreast of the latest developments, and prudent fiscal management has kept it financially viable.

membership serves to keep it abreast of the latest developments, and prudent fiscal management has kept it financially viable. The annual subscription fees have been maintained at the same level for 11 years, despite the fact that they are regularly used to fund research projects, such as:

- ▶▶ Topometric and clinical oriented anatomy of the superficial lymph vascular system in the lower extremity of human beings
- ▶▶ Organ specific characteristics of the uterine lymphatic system in rats and guinea pigs
- ▶▶ Radiogenic lymph angiogenesis in the skin
- ▶▶ Sentinel lymph node management
- ▶▶ Initial lymphatics and precollectors in lobulated white adipose tissue of the human hypodermis.

The DGL will continue to provide funding for its members' research projects in the future.

This article is taken from: Herpertz U (2006) Thirty years of the German Society of Lymphology 1976–2006. *LymphForsch* 10(2): 115–6