

The British Lymphology Society update and a look forward to the 40th anniversary year

Margaret Sneddon, Chair of the British Lymphology Society

Next year marks a significant milestone for the British Lymphology Society (BLS) as we celebrate our 40th anniversary! Founded initially as a small and relatively informal group of practitioners and healthcare professionals, we're unsure of the exact founding date, which is a great excuse to make it a year-long celebration! This year we were also pleased to be invited to contribute to the 30th anniversary celebrations of our younger sister organisation, the Australasian Lymphoedema Association. We wish them continued success for the next 30 years and beyond.

At such a key point in the organisation's history, it is important to take the opportunity to remember and reflect. This allows us to celebrate what has been achieved and offers an opportunity to build upon it. It is a chance to consider what we can improve or approach differently rather than simply continuing with the status quo – some bold steps may be needed!

In the meantime, the BLS continues to offer a great annual conference, often featuring international speakers. In 2023, we were honoured to welcome Prof Stanley Rockson from Stanford University, California, who played an active role in the program by sharing the latest updates on the drug trial he is leading. Adding to the excitement, he was joined virtually by his colleagues from the Lymphatic Education & Research Network (LE&RN), who each delivered a presentation specifically for BLS members during the conference dinner. These presentations included insights from Bill Repicci, President and CEO of LE&RN, along with appearances by 'star' guests Kathy Bates and Steve Guttenberg, who shared their personal experiences.

Two long-time members of the BLS, who will be known to many globally, were

honoured at the 2023 conference for their outstanding contribution to lymphoedema and the BLS. Dr Eunice Jeffs and Dr Rhian Noble Jones have made significant impacts as clinicians, educators, researchers, and leaders in the field. Their achievements were highlighted in our January and May issues of *News & Views*. These are available for anyone to read by signing up as a 'friend' on the membership page (free of charge) at <https://www.thebls.com/membership>.

This year, we are pleased to welcome Cheryl Brunelle, Associate Director of the Lymphoedema Research Program at Massachusetts General Hospital. Her keynote presentations will be complemented by others focusing on research and recent advancements in breast cancer-related lymphoedema (BCRL).

In recent years, we have not addressed BCRL. However, it remains a significant issue, though its 'profile' has evolved. We look forward to discussing the various presentations, such as breast oedema, which practitioners are encountering more frequently, and sharing strategies for managing these conditions.

In addition to the networking opportunities at our national conference, the submitted abstracts provide a fantastic platform for the lymphoedema community to exchange new knowledge, research, and developments. It is particularly encouraging that, despite the pressures we all face, the number of submissions has grown, showing that innovative ideas continue to thrive.

Our EveryBodyCan Campaign is ongoing, offering numerous resources to promote physical activity as a vital component of maintaining a healthy lymphatic system and long-term management.

However, the highlight of our awareness efforts each year is Lymphoedema

Awareness Week (LAW) in March. We're thrilled that so many countries and organisations are participating in awareness activities during this time. It is beneficial to share these efforts and collectively promote World Lymphoedema Day on 6 March. Local events run by our members and supporters are key to the campaign. These are supported by a great deal of social media activity and a hugely popular webinar programme.

This year, we departed from the norm for LAW webinars. While there was something for everyone, we focused on primary lymphoedema, particularly how it impacts children and young people. The involvement of young people with lymphoedema in the webinar programme was really exciting and fresh, demonstrating their resilience and how they, their families and friends ensure they have full and active lives. This was particularly so in the webinar



Figure 1. The poster for the children's activity day, LymphoAletics.

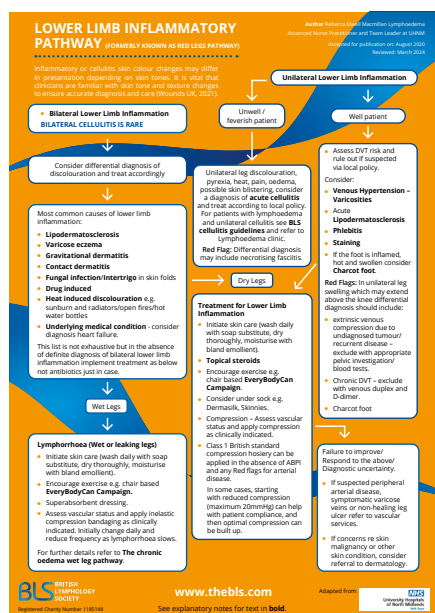


Figure 2. The the lower limb inflammatory pathway.



Figure 3. Margaret Sneddon, Dame Judi Dench, Prof Peter Mortimer (Patron to BLS) and Emma Underwood (Chair of the BLS Scientific Committee) at the fundraiser for the St George’s University Hospital Lymphoedema Research Fund.

featuring Didi Okoh, who later secured a spot on Team GB for the Paralympic Games, winning a bronze medal in the 100 metres T63.

The webinars generated significant media interest, which has greatly helped to raise the profile of lymphoedema in a very positive way. All the webinars are available on the BLS YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@britishlymph>).

Looking ahead to 2025, our plans will address lymphoedema generally, in addition to continuing the conference theme of cancer-related lymphoedema. Although BCRL may be relatively well known, few people appreciate the risks of lymphoedema following other types of cancer. To address this, we will collaborate with key partners from relevant organisations.

Our next big event is Lymphaletics 2024, set to take place in London in September. This fun-filled day of activities is designed for children and young people (CYP) with lymphoedema and their families (Figure 1). It is a great follow-up to Lymphoedema Awareness Week, which promises to be even bigger this year! The BLS Children’s Lymphoedema Special Interest Group organises and staffs this event, with financial support from BLS, the Lymphoedema Support Network, and our corporate partners, ensuring all costs for attendees are covered.

The group has been particularly active this year, preparing guidance documents for practitioners who support young people with lymphoedema and ensuring compliance with safeguarding requirements. These resources will be available soon.

Raising awareness is a year-round activity for BLS through LAW, actively presenting and exhibiting at key events across the UK. Much time and effort are also spent on the development of resources to support lymphoedema practice and extend knowledge.

This year, we have updated the BLS Limbstat for limb volume measurement and various lymph fact sheets and launched the lower limb inflammatory pathway, which is available from: <https://www.thebly.com/documents-library/lower-limb-inflammatory-pathway> (Figure 2).

Our MLD Position Document will be available soon, and we continue to develop helpful clinic resources in collaboration with our patient partners. Additionally, we are working on a new compression document and an educational resource supporting practice when lymphoedema and heart failure co-exist.

An additional highlight of the year was when two of our trustees had the chance to attend a star-studded event raising funds

for the St George’s University Hospital Lymphoedema Research Fund (Figure 3). Organised by Gemma Levine, a former society photographer and lymphoedema sufferer, the event was a huge success. It was a pleasure to spend the evening with Prof Peter Mortimer, our Patron, Bill Repicci from LE&RN, and other esteemed colleagues, while also being in the company of Dame Judi Dench, Dame Joanna Lumley, Simon Callow CBE, and many others. It was indeed a night to remember.

Needless to say, we – and all our members and supporters – remain incredibly busy. The world is experiencing very testing times and financial constraints. There are already many gaps in services for people with lymphoedema and support for those who manage their care and services.

Amid all the challenges, we must work harder and smarter to maintain the progress already made. However, the passion and commitment within the global lymphoedema community ensure that we not only rise to these challenges but continue to achieve even more for those living with lymphoedema.

To everyone working towards better lymphoedema care, very best wishes from all of us within the British Lymphology Society. Take care.