

MANUAL LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE UK (MLD^{UK})

Dee Jones

MLD^{UK} was formed in 1994 to educate healthcare professionals and the general public about the benefits of manual lymph drainage (MLD) and how it can be used to treat lymphoedema and other conditions. As well as promoting and providing information to better educate MLD therapists, healthcare professionals and the wider public, it has compiled an official register of qualified MLD therapists who are trained, insured and up-to-date in their practice. In 2008, it launched the charity MLD^{UK} Lymfund to help provide funding for those in need of MLD treatment sessions.

Key words

Lymphoedema
Manual lymph drainage (MLD)
Treatment
Education
Charity

Manual lymph drainage (MLD) is a manual therapy technique devised by Doctor Emil Vodder and his wife Estrid in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Working with Asdonk, Casley-Smith, Foeldi and the Wittlingers, the Vodders started to teach and research the effects of this wonderful therapy.

Best known for reducing the effects of lymphoedema, MLD has also been useful in healing ulcers, reducing bloating and swelling from different causes (i.e. post surgery), and in any situation where the fluid balance of the body has been affected. It helps that it is also one of the most relaxing treatments known.

MLD^{UK} was launched in 1995 in response to the perceived needs of future manual lymph drainage

therapists. It was designed to give them a specific representative body and to provide members of the public with a place where they could confidentially find a fully trained MLD

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therapist. Those on the register must supply proof of completed training in one of the five main schools (Asdonk, Casley-Smith, Földi, Leduc and Vodder), and also that they are both insured and up-to-date in their practice. Today, MLD^{UK} upholds the highest standards of training in MLD, maintains a website and dedicated telephone helpline for those seeking practical information and recognised courses for therapist training. It endeavours to educate the public and the medical profession about MLD and its applications.

History and development

A working party met several times in 1993 and 1994 to establish the parameters of what would eventually

become MLD^{UK} and its charitable arm, Lymfund. The working party was made up of MLD therapists from different backgrounds, including: nursing, massage therapies and physiotherapy. It also represented therapists from one of the five authorised schools of MLD — Asdonk, Casley-Smith, Földi, Leduc and Vodder.

The concern was that there were many organisations who were offering inadequate training. Both patients and those interested in training in MLD needed somewhere to go to find a properly qualified practitioner or teacher, respectively.

The goals were straightforward, namely:

- ▶▶ To promote and protect health by advancing the public's education and, in particular, the education of therapists and healthcare professionals
- ▶▶ To further the skills and knowledge of MLD therapists through the promotion and provision of training and information
- ▶▶ To promote the education of healthcare professionals about the use and value of MLD therapy
- ▶▶ To compile a register of MLD therapists to be used by healthcare professionals and the general public
- ▶▶ To initiate support and cooperate with others in proposals and

activities that shall further these goals.

Since these goals were defined, MLD^{UK} is proud to have pioneered the requirement for all therapists to have a review of their skills at least every two years (this is required, though our recommendation is actually for an annual assessment). This is regardless of which school they trained with and to ensure that any private practitioner is fully insured.

MLD^{UK} is also proud to be a specific representative body for therapists. As MLD is such a vital part of various treatments, including the management of lymphoedema, therapists find themselves working in many different areas. An MLD therapist could be doing work in anything from lymphoedema, equine oedema, leg ulcers and after general or facial surgery. They could also find themselves working on generally healthy people for a variety of reasons such as an annual detox or as a treatment for stress. This meant that the available representative organisations did not meet the needs of the MLD practitioner.

Thus, MLD^{UK} was born.

Early years

In the 18 months before founding MLD^{UK}, the first executive committee — Anne Vadgama, Sarah Bellhouse and Ruth Minoletti — met frequently with other MLD therapists to set up what would become first a company and then a charity.

As we defined ourselves and set out what we were hoping to achieve, we also reached into our own pockets to fund the project and to 'beg and borrow' everything from legal advice to headed paper design.

Even the definition of MLD became a challenge, with representatives from four of the main schools eventually reaching a consensus defining MLD as, 'A technique which moves the skin over the underlying tissues using repetitive and circular movements.'

Dee Jones started the MLD^{UK} newsletter with the help of Karin Höfermann and funding from the first advertiser, medi^{UK}, who continue to work with the organisation. Friendships and information exchange was set up with the Lymphoedema Support Network (LSN) and the British Lymphology Society (BLS) and overtures were made to private health insurance companies. These relationships have developed over the years as the various groups have grown.

Working on an actual patient with lymphoedema can be daunting, regardless of background in nursing, physiotherapy or massage. As a result, MLD^{UK} began a mentoring scheme.

Organisation

Today, MLD^{UK} is organised in the same way as it was at the outset. A committee is headed by a Chair (Dee Jones), a Company Secretary (Anne Schreiber) and a Treasurer (Nainesh Vasistha).

The committee meets at least four times a year to discuss policy and direction and to assign jobs. The executive committee often meets more frequently when finances or special projects need to be discussed.

We hold an annual general meeting (AGM) each year so that members can come and voice their concerns or opinions about where MLD^{UK} should be focusing its energies. Members can also contact the committee at any time with any issues they want to raise. We currently have 270 members, having started with 18.

Administration of MLD^{UK}

Our administration was originally provided by whoever was current company secretary at the time — out of boxes and in the kitchen. As MLD^{UK} grew this started to be an onerous task and in 2000 one of our members, Lynora Kennedy, found office space,

put in a dedicated telephone line and started working for MLD^{UK} on a part-time basis. She has also taken over the job as editor of the magazine.

Meanwhile, David Kennedy developed our website and enquiries came in by post, telephone and increasingly, email. Today, we get around 40,000 hits per annum on the website from people looking for information/a qualified practitioner or from practitioners looking to upgrade their skills. The website: www.mlduk.org.uk provides general information about MLD, a geographical MLD therapist search list and a list of accredited courses. There is also a members forum for feedback and therapist support.

Mentoring/placement scheme

Once a practitioner has passed their exams, they need to put what they have learnt into practice. Working on an actual patient with lymphoedema can be daunting, regardless of background in nursing, physiotherapy or massage. As a result, MLD^{UK} began a mentoring scheme.

The placement scheme means that an experienced practitioner will mentor the newly-qualified therapist in a variety of situations. Lymphoedema clinics offer anything from a day's observation to a three-week intensive treatment programme, where the newly-qualified practitioner works under strict supervision.

The scheme requires the patience of both the mentor and the patient, as bandaging can take longer to complete when performed by a new practitioner.

This scheme is available for all skill levels, so if someone is experienced in MLD and bandaging but not confident in fitting hosiery, this can be catered for. The model was developed at the Ealing Lymphoedema Clinic in 1994.

Mentoring can happen via email or telephone. The MLD^{UK} journal lists several experienced practitioners who can be contacted via telephone by other practitioners. They will answer

questions about a range of problems. The organisation has always felt that therapists need to have a good support network.

Lymfund

Our charitable arm, Lymfund, started out as an idealist's vision that came to fruition because of the efforts made by our members raising money by climbing mountains, running and cycling.

Lymfund helps patients in need to access funds for MLD treatment from a qualified practitioner. As our funds are still quite limited there are several requirements to fulfil:

- ▶ The application can only come from a member of MLD^{UK} in good standing
- ▶ The patient must have already attempted to access local NHS treatment
- ▶ Each application is for a limited number of treatments and is considered to be a 'one-off' donation.

Lymfund started awarding funds last year and five people have benefitted to date.

Fundraising events this year include a golf day organised by a lymphoedema sufferer and several sporting events around the country. Our treasurer has also put us on the Just Giving website: www.justgiving.com/mlduk and signed us up with a new government scheme where people can choose to donate to us the odd pound or pence they might have overpaid, rather than let the government have it. (The government rounds your tax up so if you owe £542.48, they round it up to £542.50.)

We are all looking forward to the continuing success of Lymfund.

Conference

MLD^{UK} holds an annual conference open to all who are interested. Subjects covered include anything from special bandaging techniques to accountancy, rosacea to filaria, psychological impacts of the patient/practitioner relationship to the history of MLD. It is a great opportunity to

learn new things and meet both old and new friends.

Each year we try to organise interesting lectures and workshops about things that MLD practitioners come across in their daily working life.

Our two-day conference in May, 2010 included lectures from Professor Peter Mortimer, Professor Hildegard Wittlinger and Professor Hugo Partsch. The conference also covered subjects including fitting hosiery for difficult situations, comparing different bandages/techniques and exploring ways to prevent personal injury through the use of MLD.

Lymphoedema

MLD is one of the main therapies in the treatment/containment of lymphoedema and lipoedema. With one outflow system (the arterial system) and two reflow systems (venous and lymph vessel systems), the lymph system is of most use for large molecule transport (i.e. proteins, etc). Manual lymph drainage has the ability to increase the action of the lymph vessels without increasing arterial filtration. A qualified practitioner knows how to redirect excess fluid into an area where the lymph vessels are undamaged and therefore helps clear the backlog. Without MLD, where does that fluid go?

However, MLD is a time-consuming process and many practitioners working in the NHS find that they have to fight to get enough allocated time per patient. One of MLD^{UK}'s aims has always been to educate the public and medical practitioners about the use of MLD, and the great benefits gained from getting early treatment before other complications develop. It is easy to get frustrated with the way things currently are, but, in comparison to the situation in 1994, things have greatly improved (i.e. many more NHS clinics operating, vastly improved knowledge of decongestive lymphatic therapy [DLT] and its components from doctors, nurses and physiotherapists through to an informed patient base), although there is still a long way to go.

Key points

- ▶▶ MLD^{UK} was formed in 1994 to educate healthcare professionals and the general public about the benefits of manual lymph drainage (MLD).
- ▶▶ MLD^{UK} maintains a website and dedicated telephone helpline for those seeking practical information and recognised courses for therapist training.
- ▶▶ The charitable arm, Lymfund, helps patients to access funds for lymphoedema treatment.
- ▶▶ MLD is one of the main therapies in the treatment/containment of lymphoedema and lipoedema.

For the lymphoedema patient looking for a private practitioner, we provide a special list from those who are members — of our 270 members, 207 are qualified lymphoedema practitioners. All of our members must be qualified, up to date and fully insured, regardless of their field of work.

The future

MLD^{UK} is as committed to its original aims now as it was 17 years ago. Our website is accessed continually for information by both patients and therapists and if you want to talk to someone in person, Lynora Kennedy is always on hand to help out.

As well as providing support for members, patients and healthcare professionals, MLD^{UK} hopes to continue informing and educating the general public and the medical world about the application, effects and uses of MLD.

If you are a patient or a therapist interested in contacting us please go to www.mlduk.org.uk, email info@mlduk.org, uk or telephone 0844 800 1998. 