



2023 National Lymphedema Network Conference: Lymphological Investigations and Explorations

Highlights from Samantha Cannon-Martin, PT, CLT-LANA

Four Lighthouse Lymphedema Network board members attended the NLN conference October 3-6, 2023. Dr. Shelley DiCecco and Frank Aviles, Jr. were faculty presenters. [Click here to learn more.](#) The following reviews are one therapist's highlights from the extensive program.

Dr. Kathleen Francis addressed the changes in lymphology over the last 50 years - The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly. The good news is that the study of lymphology continues to advance with research, awareness, and training schools to certify practitioners.

Organizations like our LLN are dedicated to increasing awareness, proper diagnosis, and treatment. More work remains to educate practitioners and support insurance coverage of Complete Decongestive Therapy (CDT).

[Dr. Shelley DiCecco](#) presented on **genital lymphedema** assessment, compression (bandaging and garments), and MLD. She provided a presentation on her cadaver research involving **lymph node number ranges** in various parts of the body. Hopefully, this will provide surgeons with a more accurate range of lymph nodes to help guide surgical decisions and help all healthcare practitioners better predict lymphedema outcomes based on the percentage of compromised lymph nodes.

Dr. DiCecco researches using cadavers with her students at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine in Georgia. Due to her large sample sizes, her findings are more extensive than previously published ranges. She looks forward to sharing the outcomes of her research.

Central Lymphatic Disease (CLD) was a focus at the conference. CLD, or dysfunction of the thorax or abdominal lymphatics, is not commonly diagnosed but may be more prevalent than we thought. CLD can lead to lymphedema, chylothorax, ascites, and increased intra-abdominal or thorax pressure. Chronic inflammation and fibrosis in organs due to decreased transport capacity of the lymphatic system can potentially lead to organ failure.



Therapists should be aware that CLD symptoms can be confused with other health issues. Symptoms include new onset breathing difficulties, abdominal bloating, truncal swelling, swelling not responsive to CDT, abdominal distention, extreme weight gain, critically low iron saturation levels, very high estrogen levels, cognitive changes, constant coughing/sounding garbled, and unusual pain complaints.

When to consider a central lymphatic problem:

- Unresponsive to typical lymphedema treatment measures
- Unexplained swelling based on the known medical history
- Signs of organ dysfunction
- Peripheral lymphedema does not rule out a central lymphatic problem, but not all individuals with lymphedema of the soft tissues have thoracic duct abnormalities.
- Treatment of CLD is not necessarily straightforward. Procedural intervention may be an option, but comprehensive rehabilitation is always necessary.

Promising Treatments that can enhance lymphatic drainage in CLD include non-traditional application of compression pumps and firmer pressure with MLD, mobilizing the sternum. Acoustic pressure waves, Cupping, Deep Oscillation Therapy, Sound Wave Therapy (Singing Bowls) and Acupuncture are creative interventions that may help manage CLD symptoms. Surgical options can include a lympho-venous bypass of the thoracic duct. As with all lymphatic dysfunctions, please talk with your medical doctor or therapist before starting any treatment, as some of these techniques are not appropriate for everyone.

[Dr. Max Itkin](#), an interventional radiologist, is the [Penn Center for Lymphatic Disorders](#) Director in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He is world-renowned for diagnosing and treating Central Lymphatic Disorders. His presentation highlighted his techniques and incredible images of his treatment outcomes. Please visit his website for more information on him and his services: [Lymphatic Disorders](#).

[Dr. Wei Chen](#) discussed the **brain's lymphatic system**. The glymphatic system (brain tissue lymphatics) was discovered by Maiken Nedergaard in 2012 and the meningeal (outer membrane layers of the brain) lymphatics were found by Antoine Louveau in 2015. Dr. Chen began research to further explain brain lymphatics in 2017. When the brain is awake, fluid only flows in the perivascular spaces or around the brain's vasculature. When a person is sleeping, the complete **glymphatic system** is active and can drain or cleanse all of the brain tissue. Dysfunctions in the glymphatic system may be linked to Alzheimer's, Huntington's, Parkinson's, Multiple Sclerosis, and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) diseases. If you want

more information about these exciting new discoveries, [click here](#) to watch a video presentation by Dr. Chen.

The conference included break-out sessions on different interest areas. Frank Aviles presented **wound care assessment and treatment** approaches. Sponsors demonstrated the newest technologies in their areas of expertise. Multiple speakers were available throughout the conference for one-on-one question sessions and the latest information on the Lymphedema Treatment Act. <https://lymphedematreatmentact.org>



LLN Board Members Frank Aviles, Samantha Cannon-Martin and Jackie Echols were joined by Allison Campbell McKinney, former LLN Board Member Molly Sleight, and Courtney Henderson at the National Lymphedema Network conference.

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Lighthouse Lymphedema Network is a 501(c)(3) organization that aims to educate, increase awareness, and provide support for individuals who have lymphedema or are interested in lymphedema. All donations are tax-deductible. [Donate](#) now.