

Focus on Faculty #9

Anna Towers



Dr. Anna Towers is an Associate Professor in the Department of Oncology and has been a Faculty member since 1986. A McGill and UK-trained family physician by background, she was Director of the Family Medicine Program at the Montreal General Hospital from 1989-1993, after which she re-oriented her career to palliative and supportive care (including cancer rehabilitation and lymphedema care). She was Director of Palliative Care McGill and the MUHC Division of Palliative Care from 1999-2009 and was Chair of the biennial International Congress on Palliative Care from 2005 to 2014.

Dr. Towers helped develop the first accredited palliative care fellowship in Canada which graduated its first Fellow in the year 2000. During her palliative care training in the UK in 1994, she was first exposed to the inclusion of lymphedema clinics within hospice care. Inspired by this experience, her main academic interest since then has been in the development of lymphedema services for cancer patients, an area in which she is recognized as a national and international leader. The clinic within the MUHC Lymphedema Program, operational since 1995, is now known as the Lymphedema Support Centre of the Breast Cancer Foundation of Quebec in recognition of the significant past support from that Foundation. A referral and assessment resource for Quebec and Eastern Ontario for complex lymphedema cases, it is now supported by the Royal Victoria Hospital Foundation and is based at the Vendome annex of the Glen site. Dr. Towers' team works in close collaboration with the Lymphedema Association of Quebec and the Quebec Ministry of Health, advising on clinical and academic matters. They are solicited on a daily basis by health professionals, policymakers and patients from across Canada to provide expert opinion on lymphedema-related issues.

In 2008 Dr. Towers was appointed by the International Lymphoedema Framework (ILF) to found and co-chair the Canadian Lymphedema Framework (CLF), along with Dr David Keast of London, Ontario. This registered charity has been operating since 2009 and its vision is that comprehensive

effective treatment for lymphedema and related disorders will be accessible to all persons across Canada. The CLF works closely with international partners as part of a global initiative to develop and promote best practices. It hosts national and international conferences as part of its work. Dr. Towers is also a teacher of specialist lymphedema therapists across North America and has certified over 500 therapists since 2008. She has travelled across Canada and in developing areas (Uganda, 2009, Barbados 2011) to advise academic institutions and Ministries of Health on either lymphedema or palliative care development.

Research projects of which Dr. Towers is involved include: a study using Dual-energy X-ray Absorptiometry and Bioelectric Impedance Spectroscopy to assess body composition in arms of women with breast cancer-related lymphedema; a study on the evaluation of lymphedema self-management techniques; and a Rossy Cancer Network-funded study on the prevention of lymphedema following gynecological cancer. She is presently involved in a project with the PERFORM laboratory at Concordia University to investigate the use of high-definition ultrasound to help stage lymphedema in breast cancer patients. In the palliative care field, her research interest is in qualitative studies relating to the new euthanasia law in Quebec.

When not involved in academic or clinical work Dr. Towers enjoys poetry, learning classical guitar and appreciating family, friends and nature in a country dwelling in the Eastern Townships.

We asked Dr. Towers to list a few of her articles whose work she is particularly proud or enjoyed the most. This is what she provided:

Towers A, Hodgson P. Lymphoedema. Chapter in MacDonald N, ed. *Palliative Care – A Case-Based Manual*, 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, 2012

Barnard D, **Towers A**, Boston P, Lambrinidou Y. *Crossing Over: Case Narratives in Palliative Care*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Towers A. Adapting compression bandaging for the palliative patient, in *Compression Therapy: a position document on compression bandaging*. International Lymphoedema Framework, UK, June 2012, p 57-61

Towers A, Hodgson P, Shay C, Keeley V. Care of the palliative patient with cancer-related lymphedema. *Journal of Lymphedema*, 5(1), 72-80, 2010