

## Therapist Undergoes Lymphedema Therapy Training after Hearing Boothbay Woman's Story.

BOOTHBAY HARBOR – Bridget Spofford learned she had lymphedema when she was undergoing radiation therapy for breast cancer.

The condition, characterized by swelling and fluid retention, is often caused by the removal of portions of the lymph system during surgery. For the Boothbay woman, diagnosed at the age of 42 with



**Bridget Spofford's experience with lymphedema after breast cancer surgery helped inspire St. Andrews Hospital Occupational Therapist Diane Brown (on right) to become a Certified Lymphedema Therapist.**

advanced breast cancer, the condition meant one more challenge during an already difficult time. Bridget had 28 lymph nodes removed during her surgery. The persistent swelling in her right arm and side made it difficult to do household chores and therapy required driving to Portland two or three times a week at a time when gas was \$4 a gallon

Finally, while seeing St. Andrews Hospital Occupational Therapist Diane Brown for another condition related to her surgery, Bridget convinced Diane that there was a need for lymphedema therapy in Lincoln County.

“I said ‘You need to do this,’” remembers Bridget.

Bridget knew several women in Lincoln County who suffered from the condition, most due to breast cancer surgery, and she knew long trips outside the county for therapy were expensive and burdensome.

She also trusted Diane as a skilled therapist and advocate for her patients.

For Diane, hearing Bridget's story convinced her of the importance of offering the service locally.

“Knowing Bridget made me decide that we really have to offer this in Lincoln County,” said Diane. “I just couldn't imagine (being in Bridget's situation) and that kind of clinched the deal for me.”

After going through a 135-hour course that required traveling to Ellsworth, Diane is now a Certified Lymphedema Therapist.

Her goal is to improve the quality of life for people suffering from lymphedema in Lincoln County.

For some patients, lymphedema can be a debilitating condition that affects every part of their life.

It can prevent people from performing simple chores, like feeding or dressing themselves. Clothes may not fit and it may also be difficult to get in and out of the shower or bath. Patients are also at risk of serious infections.

Lymphedema therapy includes manually moving and draining the fluid as well as using compression bandages to assist with fluid reduction. This therapy also includes teaching skin and nail care, and providing custom fitting for compression garments designed to maintain the reduction of edema.

While lymphedema can be debilitating, Diane said this therapy technique can result in dramatic improvements in quality of life.

And once the initial lymphedema therapy is complete, patients often only need periodic follow-up visits to maintain the improvement.

People who think they could benefit from lymphedema therapy should contact their doctor or call Diane Brown at 633-1928.