

2003	2006	2008	Fall 2008	Spring 2009
Laundry facility constructed on-site to provide local sanitation services	Governing board approved renovation of hospital facility and update of infrastructure	Phase 1 renovations completed, including Obstetrics and administration areas	RCHF inaugurated Community Grants Program	Hospital and RCHF, working through the community engagement process of Kansas Rural Health Works conducted a health needs assessment for Rice County



**RCH Rehabilitation Department**  
 Top row left to right: Kim Dillard, Vicki Johnston, Karla Peter, Leslie Robl; Bottom row: Michelle Schwerdtfeger, Miranda Reed, Deanna Pruitt.

*VICKI JOHNSTON, CERTIFIED LYMPHEDEMA THERAPIST, RCDH*

## Lymphedema patient on the road to recovery

By LOUANN COBB

Rice County District Hospital Physical Therapy/Occupational Rehab has a new service and they are excited about it. Certified Lymphedema Therapist Vicki Johnston recently completed a therapy program with Charles Jones of Lyons, who is seeing success with his swelling and diabetic wounds in his legs.

Approximately three months ago Jones was having complications and saw Karen Root APRN at Lyons Medical Center. She referred him to Johnston.

"This is a big deal for someone with the type of problem Jones has," Johnston said.

The lymphatic system is part of the immune system. When lymph vessels are unable to transport lymph fluid back into circulation it results in swelling and thickening of the skin. This protein-rich edema is known as lymphedema. Once the condition occurs, swelling increases, and in Jones' case, sores form.

If an effective treatment program is not initiated, infection can result. Because Jones is diabetic, his healing was compromised, Johnston said.

She knew Jones met all the criteria for lymphedema therapy and that it needed

to be addressed as quickly as possible. She drew up a treatment plan in early October and presented it to the doctors. Therapy started that same week.

Johnston said it was important for her to teach Jones how to effectively manage his condition. Lymphedema is a lifelong condition. It doesn't go away. Self-management is critical to its success.

The first day she took measurements, the second day she introduced the technique.

Johnston managed the lymphatic drainage using a hands-on technique known as manual lymph drainage.

"The massage technique promotes the flow of the lymphatic tissue, reduces swelling and promotes healing," she said. "It's important to always rub the legs upwards towards the lymph nodes."

Following the massage, she wrapped his legs using various sizes of non-stretch bandages, starting with the toes and layering the wraps upward towards the knees. Layering creates a pressure gradient.

Johnston said that because Jones lives alone and is unable to wrap his leg, she needed to prepare him for an alternate method. He now uses a special sock on

each leg and a pre-sized Comprefit appliance that wraps around his leg. The system is made up of layers of Velcro strips; when tightened they create a pressure variant.

"We adapted it so Charles can apply it himself," Johnston said. "His biggest responsibility is to keep up the massaging and the compressions."

"Vicky saved my life," Jones said. "I feel a lot better since I had therapy."

There aren't many lymphedema therapists, Johnston said. The ultimate goal of treatment is to reduce the swelling, restore lost function, learn methods to prevent recurrence and to help the patient manage their condition as safely as possible. Already, she's getting referrals. People who have had mastectomies, lumpectomies, radiation treatments, lymph node removal, surgeries, infections or trauma to the limbs are candidates for lymphedema therapy.

Johnston returned to RCDH in July after working three years at Hutchinson Hospital.



Charles Jones, lymphedema patient, receives therapy from Certified Therapist Vicki Johnston. (photo by LouAnn Cobb)

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**What is the best part of working at RCDH/LMC/SMC?**

I enjoy my co-workers and the patients. – Lori Viramontez

The simple answer: our co-workers are awesome. – Jimmy Hoskins

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