

## **NHS FUNDS RESEARCH PROVING DRAGON BOAT RACING BENEFITS WOMEN WITH PAINFUL BREAST CANCER SIDE EFFECTS**

The results of groundbreaking new research, released today, have proven that the ancient Chinese sport of dragon boat racing has a positive impact on the health of women who have received treatment for breast cancer.

NHS North Lancashire awarded a research bursary of £10,000 to researchers at Sheffield Hallam University in order to investigate whether physical activity can be of benefit to breast cancer survivors, in particular those who suffer with breast cancer related lymphoedema - an often distressing and painful side effect of breast cancer surgery.

It is hoped that these findings will mean that in the future women who suffer with lymphoedema can be referred to dragon boat teams as a clinically proven way of managing this chronic condition.

Dr Helen Crank, Senior Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University, used the bursary from NHS North Lancashire to carry out the study by working with 13 members of Paddlers for Life, a successful charity which helps cancer survivors regain their confidence and health through dragon boat racing. The research was carried out at Lake Windermere and the Low Wood Hotel, Cumbria, where the team practice regularly.

The results show that thanks to the strenuous activity that dragon boat racing provides, breast cancer survivors who suffered from lymphoedema saw an improvement in their symptoms. It showed that the exercise was also beneficial in women who didn't already have lymphoedema. Women from the team reported that the sport also left them feeling physically stronger with more energy and provided them a fun and exciting way of getting their lives back on track after their cancer experience.

Up to 40% of people who receive treatment for breast cancer suffer with lymphoedema. However, until now a lack of UK-based research meant it was unknown whether breast cancer survivors could safely tolerate the strenuous demands of dragon boat training and racing. It is now hoped that the outcome of this pilot research can be passed on to other healthcare professionals and women and men who have been treated for breast cancer so others across the country might have the opportunity to benefit both physically and mentally from dragon boat racing.

Paddlers for Life Secretary, Louisa Balderson, was one of the women who took part in the study. She says: *"The findings of this research are going to have an enormous impact upon the lives of women who live with lymphoedema. It will mean that they can now be referred by their GP, lymphoedema specialist or other healthcare professional to a dragon boat team such as ourselves, which could transform their physical and psychological wellbeing.*

*"We have been absolutely delighted to be able to take part in this pilot research project which we hope will be of enormous benefit to other breast cancer survivors across the UK and around the world."*

Previously advice for women who suffered with lymphoedema recommended only very gentle exercise. This research goes against what is usually prescribed for women and shows strenuous, repetitive upper body activity has a proven benefit.

Ian Cumming, Chief Executive of NHS North Lancashire, says: *“We have been very pleased to be able to support such innovative research and are extremely pleased with these positive results. We hope that more cancer survivors right across the UK can experience the physical and mental benefits that team sports such as dragon boat racing can provide.”*

*“We have made the bursary available in celebration of the NHS 60th anniversary, because we believe that through enabling new insights and developments in healthcare, we can ensure a first class health service for the next 60 years.”*

It is hoped that the findings of this pilot research study will inform a larger study which is needed to further prove the link.

Dr Helen Crank says: “I am delighted that NHS North Lancashire has been able to fund this research and I hope that breast cancer survivors with and without related lymphoedema, across the UK will be able to benefit from the results.

“Dragon boat training and racing is ideal for breast cancer survivors on many levels: it offers a fantastic and fun opportunity to exercise with like minded women, potentially the right kind of upper body activity to help manage lymphoedema with the added security that paddlers can work at their own fitness level to improve their cardiovascular fitness and physical strength.”

Denise Hardy, a Lymphoedema Nurse Specialist who is part of the research team has been encouraged by the findings. She says: "I have been amazed at the reduction in the volume of lymph in both arms and how much every woman has benefitted from the training both physically and psychologically. It is really exciting to think that this means we can encourage more vigorous exercise for our patients.”