



Personal Trainer John 'Sparrow' Dowse (right) puts Warren Straker through his paces.

Rehab program gets a revamp

The Chronic Disease Management Program is undergoing a revamp of its information resources, to help promote the service and improve its reach with the people who need it the most – patients with chronic diseases who need help in managing their symptoms and reducing of hospital readmissions.

First off the makeover block is the Chronic Disease Rehabilitation program, managed by Lissa Spencer. The program focuses on patients with acute and chronic cardiac and pulmonary health conditions, such as lung disease or recent heart surgery, as well as patients with diabetes and other comorbidities.

“By developing a more comprehensive information pack on the programs and a targeted distribution strategy, we hope to increase the number of patients who attend and improve their long-term health outcomes,” said Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist Lissa Spencer.

The rehabilitation programs are available at all the SLHD hospitals, and patients are referred to the programs through a number of avenues, including GPs, hospitals, specialists

and allied health professionals. The team of nurses and physiotherapists provide an individually designed exercise program tailored to the patient’s needs, and the patient sees the same staff member each time, ensuring a continuity of care.

“We provide our patients with a combination of exercise training, risk factor and self-management education and support,” Lissa said. “However studies have shown that the exercise training is the most effective component in ensuring a patient’s ongoing health and wellbeing.”

Following a thorough initial assessment, the exercise program consists of aerobic and strength training held in the gym and the hydrotherapy pool. Patients attend twice a week for at about 10 to 20 sessions, and work at their individual pace. Benefits of rehabilitation are an increase in exercise capacity and quality of life, a reduction in risk factors and hospital readmission, and improved self-management of disease symptoms.

“They learn to exercise safely and self-manage their disease, but we are always available for follow up care and assessment if they need it.”

Fit as a Sparrow

When Lissa Spencer’s clients finish their rehabilitation sessions, she encourages them to continue their exercise programs at home or at their gym, local pool, or socially such as through walking groups.

“CDMP Rehabilitation aims to provide our patients with an effective transition from the hospital to the community,” Lissa said.

Many of her patients attend personal trainer John ‘Sparrow’ Dowse’s senior fitness exercise classes at the University of Sydney Sports and Aquatic Centre.

“I put them through a full range of exercises that targets all muscle groups in my circuit training class,” said Sparrow, “we make sure that when they get back on their feet, they stay there.”

Sparrow has been an instructor of safe, fun and effective circuit classes for over 55 year olds for the past nine years. Previously a Wallaby fly-half, Sparrow proved that age is no barrier when he was given an enrolment into a Personal Training Certification course for his 70th birthday by his children, and has since become the oldest personal trainer to qualify with Fitness NSW.

In 2012 he won a NSW Seniors Week Achievement Award for his contribution to senior fitness.

Warren Straker, who suffers from a pulmonary condition, completed the rehabilitation program on the advice of his specialist, and found it a good introduction to using unfamiliar gym equipment. He has attended Sparrow’s senior wellness class for the last three years.

“You definitely feel the difference after coming to these classes,” said Warren, “Sparrow has helped me no end. The social nature of the class is an added bonus.”