

# CANCER REHAB

## Awareness Week

15th-21st April 2024

 *no one should miss out*

Cancer rehabilitation is focused on improving the quality of life and experience of people who have been diagnosed with cancer. It is not focused on the disease, it is focused on people, and helping them get back to living.

### The unseen struggles

Cancer survival rates have dramatically increased in the past forty years as a result of improvements in cancer prevention, detection and treatment. The newest treatments are high tech and at times medications can keep cancer growth controlled for many years, despite life limiting diagnoses. Yet, surviving cancer after an initial diagnosis, is only the beginning.

Many people emerge from treatment facing struggles far beyond their illness. Some survivors may have minimal pain and disability, but others are significantly debilitated, and a great number lie in between. Some of those who have completed treatment for cancer who are told they are cancer-free are also told that they face increased risk of cardiovascular and bone disease in the years ahead. It is very common for cancer survivors to find they have ongoing physical disabilities such as fatigue, pain and weakness, alongside emotional distress, depression and at times debilitating anxiety regarding the prospect of cancer recurring. So often too, the financial and employment implications of cancer treatment that continue into survivorship are a cause of ongoing distress to those who have 'survived' the physical disease, and to their families.

A report 'Cured but at What Cost?' published by MacMillan Cancer Support<sup>6</sup> stated that at least one in four of those living with cancer face poor health or disability after cancer treatment. Of course, it is not just those given an 'all-clear' who are affected, it also impacts those who are still undergoing primary treatment or who are living with incurable disease.

Cancer treatments take a toll on a patient's body in addition to the disease itself, so the eradication of cancer is not the final step in a patient's recovery and preventing unnecessary long-term disability is essential.

### What is cancer rehabilitation?

Cancer rehabilitation can be defined as a process that assists the cancer patient to obtain maximal physical, social, psychological, and vocational functioning within the limits created by the disease and its resulting treatment. It is recognized that patients may have rehabilitation needs throughout their care pathway and cancer rehabilitation can be **preventative, restorative, supportive, and palliative** at any stage of the pathway.

### What happens if people don't have access to cancer rehabilitation?

If people miss out on cancer rehabilitation, they can suffer physical disability and mental health problems that could have been prevented.

Many of the physical symptoms that arise during or after treatment go unmentioned, and therefore remain untreated, this can often mean that suffering escalates. The key is identifying the problem. PINC & STEEL Certified Oncology Rehabilitation clinicians are trained to identify impairments through a detailed screening process. If detected early, many of these are easily addressed and often resolved by specific and supported rehab intervention. If the impairments have been present for many weeks or months, they can become very difficult to effect with short term rehabilitative input and require extensive and expensive long-term management.

It is clear that optimising the access to cancer rehabilitation, and therefore the outcomes for people affected by cancer is important, arguably essential, both to improve well-being *and* to reduce the societal and financial impacts of cancer on individuals, families, enterprises and society at large.

## The case for ACTION

Current oncology practice is, “failing those with cancer” with regard to prescribing exercise rehab, says a Call-to-Action Report from a global coalition of forty leaders from seventeen organisations, spearheaded by the American College of Sports Medicine.<sup>1</sup>

There are 44 million cancer survivors worldwide and 18.1 million new diagnosis each year.<sup>1</sup> A Macmillan survey concluded that more than 70% of people diagnosed with cancer say they’re struggling with physical side effects 1-10 years after treatment.<sup>2</sup> However, there is increasingly strong evidence that cancer rehabilitation can help prevent and manage these side effects, caused by cancer or its treatment. It can reduce the impact of side effects such as pain, lymphoedema, anxiety, depression and impaired mobility.<sup>2</sup> Long-term cancer rehabilitation is an effective way to help recover physical function, manage fatigue, improve quality of life and mental health, and control body weight.<sup>3</sup>

Since 2010, more than 2500 randomized-controlled exercise trials have been published specifically focusing on cancer. There is now more evidence on the benefits of exercise oncology than there was for heart disease when cardio-rehab became a standard of care.<sup>4</sup>

## Cancer rehabilitation is not just about exercise

Cancer rehabilitation is more often about movement than it is about exercise. It addresses how to get started, works on how movement might look depending on an individuals’ preferences and goals, and supports patients to progress towards what *they* identify as being important to *them*.

A characteristic of our Certified PINC & STEEL Oncology Rehabilitation physiotherapists and occupational therapists is that they have time to listen. They have time to hear the concerns of those affected by a cancer diagnosis, and to build a program to support them to achieve their goals.

Whether the goal is getting back to their previous work, being able to socialise without extreme fatigue; having the strength to lift their children; to sleep through the night or have the stamina to cope with an overseas trip. Cancer rehabilitation can help.

### We need your help to share this message

If you know someone diagnosed with cancer, make sure they see a Certified Cancer Rehabilitation therapist in their community so they can LIVE MORE and FEAR LESS after their cancer diagnosis. If you have had a cancer diagnosis yourself, take a moment to check out this list...

Do you have concerns about your body since your cancer diagnosis?

Do you have painful or swollen areas? Numbness or tingling?

Do you find yourself easily exhausted or lacking energy?

Do you have difficulty relaxing or sleeping well?

Are you experiencing shortness of breath or feeling more breathless?

Has your balance and coordination been affected?

Are you unable to take part in activities and hobbies that you love?

Are you struggling to get back to work or manage with tasks at home?

Do you feel weaker or stiffer in your muscles and joints?

Do you have new difficulties with your bladder or bowels?

Do you feel stuck about how to be more active or get back to exercising?

**Cancer Rehabilitation can help with that.**

**No one should miss out.**

#### References:

1. Schmitz K, Campbell A, et al. *Exercise is medicine in oncology: Engaging clinicians to help patients move through cancer*. CA 2019; 69, 6
2. Macmillan Cancer Support (2009) *It's no life: living with the long-term effects of cancer*
3. Macmillan Cancer Support (2011) *The importance of physical activity for people living with and beyond cancer: A concise evidence review*
4. Ormel HL van der Schoot GGF, Sluiter WJ, Jalving M, Gietema JA, Walenkamp AME. Predictors of adherence to exercise interventions during and after cancer treatment: a systematic review. *Psychooncology*. 2018; 27: 713-724.
5. Stout NL, Baima J, Swisher AK, Winters-Stone KM, Welsh J. A systematic review of exercise systematic reviews in the cancer literature (2005-2017). *PM R*. 2017; 9: S347-S384.
6. Macmillan Cancer Support (2013) *Cured- But at What Cost? Report*.