

Working together to ensure structured exercise is safe and more accessible for cancer survivors

Jason Schild¹, Tricia LaBella^{1,2}, Julie Marker²

1. Diploma of Fitness, TAFE SA Regency Park, South Australia; 2. Cancer Voices South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia

Introduction

Despite growing evidence of the benefits of exercise after cancer*, uptake and maintenance of physical activity by cancer survivors is limited.

Cancer survivor members of Cancer Voices SA and the Diploma of Fitness at Regency Park TAFE in South Australia were **concerned that cancer survivors are missing out on safe, accessible physical activity opportunities.**

There are gyms and fitness trainers practicing in most towns and regions across Australia, and surely opportunities exist to increase utilisation of the skills of these professionals and facilities to help cancer survivors!

How can cancer survivors get easy access to safe and supportive exercise advice? **Can local gyms, fitness trainers, physios, exercise physiologists AND consumers work together to 'shape a solution'?**

Aims

To commence communication and collaboration between a range of cancer and fitness stakeholders,

- to explore ways we could work together
- to ensure exercise is safe and more accessible for cancer survivors.

Progress so far

A Forum was hosted by Cancer Voices SA and the Diploma of Fitness at TAFE SA in October 2014.

About 50 participants, including cancer survivors, exercise physiology, physiotherapy, fitness trainer students and professionals attended.

Three speakers gave presentations from the perspective of

- **a cancer survivor**
- **fitness trainer** with a number of cancer survivor clients
- **exercise physiologist** who runs a cancer rehab program.

This was followed by lively discussion among stakeholders to identify issues related to cancer survivors and exercise, its safety and utilisation.

Forum speakers shared their experience and knowledge around

- **What is currently happening** in the way of exercise provision for cancer survivors
- **How exercise can benefit cancer survivors**
- **Risks** associated with exercise for (some) cancer survivors
- The importance of Trainer-Allied Health Professional contact
- **How services can be improved**



Cancer survivor and TAFE educator **Tricia LaBella** facilitated the Forum and supervised **Jason Schild**, a Diploma of Fitness TAFE student who developed the forum as his Manage Projects elective in collaboration with **Julie Marker** from Cancer Voices SA

Tricia had involvement in the 'Strength for Life' program development, for gyms to support structured exercise for older adults. Programs for cancer survivors could build on this existing platform, as challenges for de-conditioned cancer survivors are often similar to those of older people.



"How to ensure structured exercise is safe and more accessible for cancer survivors"

This forum will highlight both the benefits and risks around exercise for cancer survivors and begin to identify additional training needs for exercise trainers working with this client group.

Forum speakers:



Lymphoma survivor Rosemary gave an inspiring account of her rehabilitation progress post treatment from wheelchair, to walking frame, and now walking with the aid of a stick and riding her tricycle to the local gym. Rosemary achieved a pathway from a clinical supported program to community based ongoing one.

Carol Dowden, a Fitness professional and business owner working with many cancer survivors

Carol described her work supporting clients during and after cancer treatment.



Morgan Atkinson, an Exercise Physiologist at Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre in Adelaide, who has extensive experience developing exercise programs for people with cancer.

Morgan is commencing research trials to determine the effectiveness of his programs.



For further information

*Video recordings of Forum presentations will become available at Cancer Voices SA www.cancervoicesa.org.au a 100% volunteer organisation, raising a voice for people affected by cancer.

Contact info@cancervoicesa.org.au if you wish to join this 'exercise and cancer' information sharing network.

Results

Issues identified:

- some **risks** in exercise for **some** cancer clients/patients;
- patchy knowledge of **what is currently being offered** in the way of exercise instruction and support for cancer clients,
- **lack of trust and inter-professional boundaries** eg. - a **lack of understanding of fitness trainers' skills, training and expertise**, and
- interest in **information about cancer survivorship issues** that may impact on exercise options.

'Next steps' elicited during the Forum included:

- establish a 'multi-disciplinary working group';
- develop a **risk screening/ stratification tool** to assist fitness professionals design appropriate exercise interventions for patients and survivors;
- **clarify** and improve understanding of the different **skills and qualifications** of different professionals;
- site visits for students and professionals to grow in trust and 'learn from each other'
- create **pathways from clinical supported programs to community based programs**,
- develop a **register of practitioners and services**; and,
- **establish a network for sharing information** on this topic between interested professionals and consumers eg hold further forums, newsletters etc.

Conclusions

Through working together with cancer survivors and key stakeholders with interest in promoting the benefits of exercise, we aim to further develop methods and approaches to support the implementation of **safe and accessible exercise for cancer survivors.... wherever you live!**

* New evidence on physical activity

- *Physical activity after treatment for cancer can reduce the impact of some debilitating side effects, such as swelling around the arm, anxiety, depression, fatigue, impaired mobility and weight changes⁵.*
 - *Emerging evidence shows that achieving sufficient activity levels can reduce the risk of dying from breast, bowel and prostate cancer, and reduce the recurrence for breast and bowel⁶.*
- Move More** : Physical activity the underrated 'wonder drug' (2014) Macmillan Cancer Support UK

Survivorship Conference, 6 - 7 Feb 2015 in Adelaide.