Therapeutic Recreation: Supporting Physical Activity and Well-Being

Michelle Svarich, Rec T, BA RLS, Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital

Health is “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease” (World Health Organization, 1947).

The role of therapeutic recreation is to support the health of patients with the use of dynamic therapies impacting the multiple dimensions of wellness.

Recreation therapists use a patient-centred approach to reduce barriers and identify facilitators for physical, mental and social well-being.

Recreational therapists are responsible for the treatment, education and provision of adapted recreational opportunities for patients. Recreational therapy services are designed to restore, remediate and rehabilitate patients to improve functional abilities and restore independence. The focus of therapy is to reduce or eliminate activity limitations and restrictions to activities of daily living and leisure caused by an illness or disabling condition. (American Therapeutic Recreation Association, 2009)

Facilitating Wellness

Recreation therapists facilitate wellness by addressing a range of barriers, including:

- issues related to access to programs;
- transportation needs;
- accommodation required to participate in an activity; and
- self-efficacy.

The roles of therapeutic recreation are dynamic, encompass multiple dimensions of the individual, and cover multiple types of activities. This article will only focus on the physical activity aspect.
The focus of therapy is to reduce or eliminate activity limitations and restrictions to activities of daily living and leisure caused by an illness or disabling condition. (American Therapeutic Recreation Association, 2009)

Towards Independence
In order to determine the type of intervention, recreation therapists use a structured process to progress patients from a clinical setting to the community, with the goal of complete independence. The process includes:

- a patient-centred evaluation;
- goal setting activities;
- trying activities and aids within a structured supportive environment; and
- transitioning skills or new interests from inpatient to outpatient care, with the goal of independent community participation.

Benefits of Therapeutic Recreation
Therapeutic recreation impacts multiple components of the patient. Some of the recognized benefits include:

1) Physical Health
- reduced risk of complications secondary to disability
- improved physical and perceptual motor function

2) Psychosocial Health
- reduced depression, anxiety and stress
- improved self-esteem and social skills
- improved coping behaviour

3) Cognitive Functioning
- improved or maintained cognitive function and memory
- reduced confusion and disorientation

4) Life Satisfaction
- improved quality of life, social support, and community integration

Golf “Fore” All
Golf Clinic is a recreation therapy program developed at the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital.

Recreation therapists involved with the program work on a health care team, along with occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech therapists, nurses, therapy aids, doctors, psychologists, dietitians, and students.

In 2013, Golf Clinic was updated with the addition of an assessment clinic that focused on increasing patient-centred therapy on-site.

The Interdisciplinary Student Services (a combination of physical therapy, occupational therapy and recreation therapy students) assisted with the update, which now includes the following four phases.
Phase one:
- The identification and referral of patients currently undergoing treatment.

Phase two:
- A one-hour mobility and lifestyle assessment by students and a supervising therapist.

Phase three:
- Three one-hour sessions at the driving range with a professional golf instructor for sport-specific expertise, along with support from the recreation therapist.
- The program recommends that each patient play a 9-hole round of golf, facilitated by the clinic staff.

Phase four:
- The clinic concludes with a 9-hole Texas scramble golf tournament with patients and their friends and family.

The Golf Clinic program aims to:
- improve body awareness and balance;
- improve self-confidence and self-efficacy;
- increase golf knowledge and skill;
- learn about accommodations to make golf enjoyable;
- increase understanding of community resources and opportunities; and
- improve interpersonal skills.

At the conclusion of the program, one patient made a comment that still resonates loudly:

“Physical therapy taught me to walk again, but you gave me a reason.”

Emerging Roles in Therapeutic Recreation

In addition to promoting physical activity, recreation therapists focus on many other aspects of health care, such as:
- stroke recovery, with a focus on community reintegration;
- obesity management and chronic disease prevention;
- provision of services to clients at home (as part of home care); and
- development of partnerships with community organizations to create inclusive programs, e.g., associated with mental health, addictions, cardiac rehabilitation, or health promotion (Porter & Burlingame, 2006).
Summary

People with disabilities and illnesses want to do more than recover functioning; they want to build a life of meaning and engagement; they want to feel their lives have purpose and value; they want to experience happiness and a sense of connection to others; and they want to feel they are powerful agents in their own lives (Carruthers and Deyell Hood, 2007).

Recreation therapists work with clients to develop a tailored approach to help them increase their mental, physical and emotional well-being through interventions that may include physical activity. Recreation therapy is one of the essential treatment areas within the health care team.

References


Workplace Wellness an Important Part of Wellness Discussions

Honourable Dave Rodney, Associate Minister of Wellness

As Associate Minister of Wellness, I’m pleased to say that Alberta is making great strides when it comes to making wellness a priority. This is especially apparent in Alberta’s workplaces.

Workplace wellness initiatives play an essential role in spreading wellness — and the Government of Alberta is a proud partner in creating positive change within Alberta’s workplaces.

We can all celebrate the many achievements gained by Alberta’s wellness champions — and I encourage them to keep up the great work. They’ve been building healthier and happier lives, both at home and at work. As you know, the workplace provides an ideal opportunity to bring like-minded individuals together to share ideas, and further promote and encourage improved health and wellness. In fact, workplace wellness initiatives have helped develop innovative solutions and improve quality for so many Albertans.

Everyday, the Government of Alberta encourages more Albertans to commit to their own wellness through partnerships with schools, communities, workplaces and organizations. Last fall, I hosted a pre-symposium on workplace wellness that helped spark important discussions. This fall, those discussions will continue. Together, we can strive to create environments where healthy, active choices are made easy.

Thank you again for continuing to act as health champions by spreading the message and by helping Albertans make physical activity, mental well-being and healthy eating a part of their everyday lives.