

# Optimizing stroke recovery



By Leanne Burton

Recovery from a stroke is not a quick or easy process. It involves a large team of health care professionals and a lot of hard work from the stroke survivors themselves. As movement specialists with expertise in neurological rehabilitation, physiotherapists are well-adept at guiding individuals through recovery from stroke.

A stroke happens when there is an interruption of blood supply in the brain. Depending on where the stroke occurs, it can affect a person's functioning in areas such as speech, thinking and movement. Every person has different challenges and goals after their stroke, so an individualized, interdisciplinary care plan is essential to meeting one's potential after stroke.

Physiotherapists are an integral part of stroke rehabilitation as they assist with all areas of movement. Early intervention with physiotherapy affects the prognosis of a stroke and is important for restoring function. Physiotherapy stroke rehabilitation starts in the hospital as soon as patients are medically stable and safe to mobilize. Regular physiotherapy helps individuals become

as independent as possible with their mobility such as walking, transfers and stairs. Some patients are able to return home directly from hospital and continue their stroke rehabilitation in the community, while others need more help and are transferred to an inpatient stroke rehabilitation facility for more therapy before returning home.

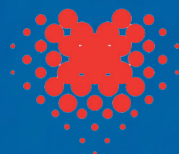
The role of physiotherapy in stroke rehabilitation starts with an assessment to determine how a person's stroke has impacted their physical function. After the assessment, physiotherapists take time to explain their assessment findings to the patient and then work with that person to identify meaningful activities that the stroke survivor would like to return to. These activities are then used as a starting point to create realistic goals that are specific for the person making an individualized treatment plan. In gaining a greater understanding of a patient's condition through the assessment findings, physiotherapists are able to use best practice to help address their unique needs and regain independent function. This is where the real work begins for the stroke survi-

vor and physiotherapists are there to support individuals through the hard work that is required to optimize recovery. As experts in movement, physiotherapists are qualified to teach patients more efficient ways to move, how to modify activities, and how to re-educate the muscles to regain motor control.

Physiotherapists also assist with discharge planning, an often-complex process that can look different person to person. Discharge planning includes the practice of specific tasks that patients need to be able to complete at home and working with the interdisciplinary team to identify barriers to discharge. Patients are typically discharged when they are safe to return home with supports from family and homecare, where they will continue with their recovery from the community. All physiotherapists are trained with neurological education to help patients regain function and can continue to assist in an outpatient setting. Regardless of one's mobility, physiotherapy can help.

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