

Stretching Beyond City Limits



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By Brandi Johnson

People who live in remote communities tend to encounter more extraneous circumstances when it comes to medical care than those living in urban centres. In fact, in certain situations and almost always in extreme scenarios, people living outside of major centres must travel to receive urgent and/or specialized treatment.

When it comes to physiotherapy however, the different challenges that living and working in remote communities present are taken into account. Rural physiotherapists offer a wide spectrum of care to accommodate this.

Romy Russell has been a physiotherapist in Swan River since 1998. She started her career in public practice working at a rural hospital treating a mix of both in and outpatients. Today she continues to work as a sole 'private' practice physiotherapist.

"One scenario is not necessarily better than the other, however larger populated areas afford therapists the chance to focus in on one area of care. When it comes to rural physio, many of my colleagues tend to be more generalists so that we can treat as many patients as possible," she says. "We really mentor and support each other. It's a wonderful industry to be a part of."

Living in northern Manitoba has different challenges than living in the south. A common misconception is that there is less quality care, which Russell says is simply not true. "As physiotherapists, we often see a higher percentage of manual labourers as well as an older population with greater limitations to rehab facilities. However, it's our normal and we adapt."

In rural regions, physiotherapists treat a variety of injuries from northern based industries such as logging and mining. If they work in public practice, such as a hospital setting, they may also care for their patients after they are discharged as outpatients. From orthopaedic treatment to vocational reconditioning, from paediatric patients to seniors, rural physiotherapists see it all.

In some instances, on account of distance, follow up visits are more infrequent and there are fewer resources in terms of outdoor conditions and indoor places to exercise. For example, some communities don't have facilities that are open in the evening much less level sidewalks. Retail supplies are not as plentiful when it comes to rehabilitation needs, which is another factor.

"For those of us who have grown up in rural settings, we understand the limitations and adapt our rehab plans accordingly.

Exercise programs have to be modified and adapted to the resources that a person has,

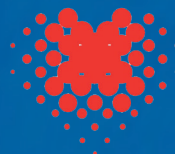
whether they are physical or financial. You just have to be more creative at times." Russell, for example, will instruct her seniors to go to the larger grocery store in town during the colder months to walk.

The objective, however, remains the same – to help her patients feel better. "For every patient, we set goals, whether that is to move more fluidly, have less pain or return to work. For others they want to get back to golf or sit comfortably through a child's recital – whatever their motivation, physiotherapy can help."

Russell adds, "There's additional motivation when you work in rural communities because you often have a connection to your patient. They might be a neighbour or friend of a friend; they might be your child's teacher or your friend's mother. What's more is that it's so inspiring to watch their progress when you see them in town."

To start feeling your best, see a physiotherapist today!

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