



Cardiac rehab may not reach enough people

Provided by **LAUREEN ALBRECHT**

PORT CHARLOTTE REHABILITATION CENTER

Each day, nearly 2,200 people die from cardiovascular diseases, and every year there are 1.5 million heart attacks and strokes.

Even though heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, too few people get a referral for cardiac rehabilitation programs. Out of the few that do get a prescription to enter cardiac rehab, research indicates that patients rarely follow through with doctor's orders.

"Despite the body of original evidence and clinical practice guidelines in support of cardiac rehabilitation, referral and participation remain alarmingly low. The reasons for poor referral and participation are complex and multifactorial," wrote Ross Arena, PT, Ph.D — in a letter to the American College of Cardiology.

Researchers are now looking at cardiac rehabilitation participation rates by comparing medical records of nearly 60,000 heart attack patients. They found that roughly 64 percent of heart attack patients did receive a script for cardiac rehab. But approximately 23 percent

attended only one therapeutic session. Just 5.4 percent completed the number of sessions typically covered by health insurance.

Lead author, Dr. Jacob A. Doll, of Duke Clinical Research Institute in Durham, N.C., reports that cardiac rehab increases physical and cardiovascular fitness through structured exercise and education sessions.

"Patients may attend individual or group sessions to improve medication adherence, help them quit smoking, lose weight, improve their diet and manage chronic diseases, while also focusing on psychological and social well-being," says Doll to Reuters Health.

"Some people will be too sick after a heart attack to exercise safely, but this should be a fairly low percentage," Dr. Doll told Reuters Health by email. "Most other people can benefit — especially older adults."

A heart expert and award-winning cardiovascular surgeon, Dr. Gonzalo Carrizo who practices in Port Charlotte, says that cardiac rehab aims to reverse limitations brought by a cardiac event, coronary bypass surgery or coronary angioplasty.

When a patient does participate in rehab, a typical monitored session involves five to 10 minutes of warm-up, a gradual 30 to 40 minutes of paced aerobics, followed by five to 10 minutes of cool down.

Exercise training has the capacity to promote other aspects of rehab, which include changing lifestyle risk factors and increasing psychosocial support. "The outcome measures of cardiac rehabilitation should include improvement in quality of life," says Kristin Cardona, administrator for Port Charlotte Rehabilitation Center.

Cardona says that improved life quality means patients get back to "playing with the grandkids, riding a bike or swinging a golf club."

Carrizo believes that rehab will limit the risks of functional deterioration of cardiac events and improve or relieve cardiac induced body dysfunction once an appropriately formulated and individualized cardiac rehab plan is implemented.

Continued research shows that rehab improves the survival rates and daily function of those who survive a heart attack.

Nonetheless, there continues to be a

lack of patient interest and physician referral towards cardiac rehab.

"Not all (heart attack) patients are referred, some for valid reasons such as inability to exercise, difficulty in scheduling due to their job, lack of transportation, need to care for a sick spouse, etc," said Dr. Jerome L. Fleg of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute in Bethesda, Md., in Reuters Health.

"Quality improvement efforts should focus not only on increasing referral rates but also on addressing barriers to attending rehabilitation sessions, such as travel distance, co-payments, and lack of coordination between inpatient and outpatient clinicians ..." reports the American Physical Therapy Association.

"If you think you may be a candidate for cardiac rehab, talk with a physician and ask if therapy can help you," says Cardona.

For more information, call Port Charlotte Rehabilitation Center at 941-235-8011. They offer comprehensive rehabilitative outpatient and inpatient services for short- or long-term care. They are located at 25325 Rampart Blvd., Port Charlotte.