Improving the delivery of cardiac rehabilitation in Australia

The Heart Foundation’s Cardiac Rehabilitation Advocacy Strategy
Heart disease is the leading single cause of death of men and women in Australia and affects 685,000 people. Each year around 55,000 Australians suffer a heart attack. On discharge from hospital, every patient should be referred to a cardiac rehabilitation program to start them on the road to recovery and ongoing management of their condition. But this is not happening.

A critical step in a he

The issue

Repeat heart attacks are all too common and costly. A third of all heart attacks in Australia are repeat events and in 2010 the cost of these repeat events exceeded $8 billion. Cardiac rehabilitation can saves lives and money, with research showing that it leads to improved patient outcomes, including fewer deaths and hospital readmissions.

Cardiac rehabilitation programs are only effective if people attend. With estimated participation rates as low as 10-30% the benefits of cardiac rehabilitation are not being realised. A recent UK modelling study found that increasing cardiac rehabilitation delivery to 65% of eligible patients resulted in a 10% reduction in emergency readmissions and saved over £30 million.

The key challenges to improve the uptake of cardiac rehabilitation are well established and include:

- lack of referral to cardiac rehabilitation programs
- varied belief and support in the value of cardiac rehabilitation by the clinical profession
- emphasis on traditional cardiac rehabilitation models that can present barriers to patients who are younger, work, live remotely, have cultural or language needs or do not wish to attend a group format
- complex and unstable funding arrangements
- lack of data and performance monitoring

Cardiac rehabilitation is a professionally supervised program usually lasting between 6 and 10 weeks. Supporting people with heart disease and other heart conditions, programs include physical activity, health education, counselling, behaviour modification strategies and support for self-management.

Heart disease is a lifelong condition that needs ongoing management for patients to live longer and healthier lives.
Time for action

As part of the Heart Foundation *For all Hearts* 2013–2017 strategic plan, we have developed a strategy to improve cardiac rehabilitation service provision in Australia. The six key priority areas for action are:

1. Support national, state and territory efforts to integrate referral to cardiac rehabilitation services as a standard component of cardiac care.

2. Establish uniform quality performance measures, data collection and routine reporting.

3. Increase public awareness of cardiac rehabilitation and its benefits.

4. Enhance health professional engagement and education on the importance of cardiac rehabilitation.

5. Identify funding reform to drive service improvements and boost referral and participation.

6. Document and promote key principles and examples of good practice in the provision of different models of cardiac rehabilitation throughout Australia.

Collectively, these efforts will:
- increase patient participation
- reduce hospital re-admissions
- improve health and quality of life outcomes.

Cardiac rehabilitation is the first, critical step on the road to recovery from a heart attack. We know it works. We need to make sure it works for everyone.

Want to know more? Email clinicalissues@heartfoundation.org.au
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References

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PRO-157

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