



Helen Connor & Heather Curtis



Industry profile: Physiotherapy

Introducing ourselves ...Heather and Helen... '2 Poms' ...and physiotherapists with a special interest in the amputee!

Heather trained as a physio in the UK starting her career in the East end of London. Two years of the NHS was enough to send her travelling the world with no intent of being a physio again! She arrived in Melbourne penniless and looking for new opportunities and took a job at St Vincent's where amputee rehabilitation became a special interest. Helen has a nursing background that brought her down under. As an intensive care nurse working night shifts frequently and doing agency work to make ends meet Helen decided to study physiotherapy, with the goal of working in sports medicine!!!! Once qualified as a physio Helen had the

privilege (!) of working with Heather at Royal Talbot in 1996. Planting the seeds which led to career opportunities for Helen in 1997 when Heather went on maternity leave! So we both have been specializing in the area for quite some time, collaborating, sharing many skills and ideas along the way. (More recently research)

What is our role as your physiotherapist?

As 'physios' we are concerned with looking at your mobility from a prosthetic and a non prosthetic perspective. We aim to maximize your safety and prepare you with the necessary physical skills be it balance, strength, flexibility or fitness that you require to regain your independence. People often arrive in their first physiotherapy

session apprehensive about what lies ahead but usually find physio informative, encouraging, challenging and fun...Everyone copes with amputation in a different way and the challenge for us is to find the best way to assist you to come to terms with your loss and yet reclaim a new and fulfilling life.

What are your first memories of physiotherapy?

Memories of those dreaded physio visits...forcing you to get out of bed when you just wanted to sleep or your first visit to the gym when you arrived in rehab...not knowing what to expect and what you were going to be asked to do?! Most of you would have soon worked out that your progress depends on your work in the 'Amps gym'. Yes we can be such hard task masters that



Helen Connor & Heather Curtis

relentlessly progress difficulty of all your tasks from one session to the next. Our intentions are always to assist you to that 'exit' out of rehab ...with all those inspirational 'pep' talks along the way, convincing you the hard yards early on pay off later on!

Physical recovery can be a major focus whilst you are adjusting to this major life changing event...we are always inspired by the strength of the human spirit. Maybe one of your therapy sessions was the first place you laughed, whilst those physio's were working you hard?! You can now reflect and say it was all worthwhile!

At this point we would have asked you to define your goals ... these are often very ambitious (good on you) and we might have encouraged you to consider more achievable stepping stones in the short term, not wanting you to be too disappointed or place too higher expectations on yourself too early.

For us when an amputee comes back and tells you they have been to 'Chaddie', the local pub or to a 'footie' match for the first time, climbed cradle mountain or ridden around the bay in a day, or had a fishing expedition to North Road pier or ran 100m in the para-olympics ...it's brilliant and we are glad to be proven wrong! Seeing people move through their grief and accepting their loss is such a major part of recovery but this does facilitate the change of focus onto new goals.

Why do we enjoy working with Amputees?

Every day we utilize such a diversity of skills to help you get back on your feet or to regain your independence.

Every time we see a new amputee fitted with a prosthesis and start their walking retraining it is still an exciting time for us. The challenge for us is to aim to get you walking in the safest but optimum way, where "the public" don't recognize that you have had an amputation. This may not be possible for all levels of amputation and for higher levels our aim is to assist you to conserve energy and to prevent other physical problems such as back or hip pain. Seeing each and everyone of you regain your mobility and rebuild your 'lives' is very rewarding. We couldn't achieve these goals without the assistance of our skilled prosthetists, who we constantly pester for their input to fine tune your fit and alignment.

Keeping abreast of prosthetic trends, a world of technology that is forever developing also makes our job more interesting. Keeping up to date allows us to share information professionally and with you all.

We like to act as resource for all our patients and for other therapists especially those working in isolation particularly in the country. So if you have any questions...

Do we have any 'take home' messages for you?

We recently completed some research collaboratively looking at the incidence of falls and measures to predict falls in below

knee amputees at discharge and 6 months follow up. Sadly you are all likely to experience falls...the nature of the beast... But we found that if people stay fit and active their chances of falling are diminished. We get you fitter and stronger during your rehabilitation and then it seems that some of you take to the couch or just don't walk or exercise enough ... this is a major area of concern to us. Inactivity can have a detrimental effect on many aspects of your health and wellbeing.

You also need to stay fit to cope with the increased demands of using your prosthesis ...also to keep your waistline trim and so that you can still fit into your wheelchair or prosthesis!

So please don't hesitate to contact your physio to help review your exercise program, to give you ideas to start a new exercise campaign or if you are concerned about your mobility! Also if you want advice on exercise before you take up a new activity or sport.

As physio's we will continue to strive for more appropriate facilities in the community to help you stay fit and active after you leave hospital and have fun whilst maintaining a healthier lifestyle. (We're sure Limbs4 life will play a big part in this venture in the future)

Helen Connor & Heather Curtis

First Published 2006
© Limbs 4 Life Inc.

www.limbs4life.org.au
1300 78 2231