

The Power of Determination: CAPA member pushes for community therapy pool

By: Mary Brachaniec

I have been a swimmer since I was about twelve years old and am a firm believer in the benefits of water exercise. I still visit the pool two to three times a week and know that this commitment has kept me mobile and strong. This has definitely minimized any disability relating to my arthritis and related health difficulties.

As a physiotherapist I quickly learned that water based exercise is proven therapy for persons with arthritis and other painful conditions. The buoyancy of the water allows for free, gentle movement of stiff and painful joints. While working in a hospital setting in Halifax early in my career I saw first hand how exercise in our physiotherapy pool helped our arthritis clients improve their mobility and reduce joint pain. Patients admitted for arthritis reported great benefit from pool therapy and enjoyed improved mobility and increased comfort by exercising in warm water.

In the early 1990's while taking some time off work due to my own difficulties with arthritis, I was able to work with the Nova Scotia Division of The Arthritis Society to initiate and lead a weekly therapy class for people with Ankylosing Spondylitis in Halifax in a local therapy pool. This was the first time a therapy pool was used for community based programming in the area and it was a big hit!

When working as a physiotherapist in a small hospital in Western Canada in 1995-96 the first thing I noticed was the lack of access to a therapy pool. Due to my strong belief that no physiotherapy program can be complete without access to a pool, I worked with the local, newly opened community pool and we set up weekly physiotherapy classes there. It was a new concept for the community and patients welcomed this new program.

After I experienced significant health difficulties while working in Western Canada my family and I moved back to my hometown of Moncton, New Brunswick in 1997. I was disappointed to learn that there is not a single therapy pool in Moncton, or indeed, anywhere in Southeastern New Brunswick. Neither physiotherapy department in the two major hospitals in Moncton area is equipped with a therapeutic pool and no recreational pool in the area offers sufficiently warm temperatures or accessibility for people with arthritis or other physical challenges.

I learned about plans for a new YMCA for the Greater Moncton Area and approached senior Y management about the possibility of including a therapy pool for their new facility. With the assistance of the NB Division of The Arthritis Society we did a literature search on the benefits of water exercise. In addition to a few studies describing the benefits of hospital based hydrotherapy programs for patients with arthritis a study published in the Canadian Physiotherapy Association Journal in 2001 described significant reductions in pain and gains in flexibility, walking ability and overall well being among arthritis sufferers who took part in a twelve week, water exercise program held in a community based therapy pool. We determined that there are approximately 17,000 persons with arthritis in the Moncton area alone and this number will increase with the *aging of the baby boomers*.

In the Fall of 2001 we brought all of this information to the planners for the new Y and were extremely pleased to be invited to building planning sessions. Senior planners and YMCA management ultimately decided to include a therapy pool in their new facility scheduled to open November 2004. The pool will be housed in the same area as the main recreational pool and will be accessible with seating along the side and railings surrounding the inner perimeter of the pool. Water temperature will be maintained at 92 degrees Fahrenheit – an ideal temperature for people with arthritis.

With our encouragement and assistance the Y implemented an excellent arthritis pool class in 2002 and although accessibility has limited participation by many, these classes have expanded and are most successful. YMCA staff have furthered their education in arthritis programming and

have big plans for the opening of the therapy pool in November. The pool may also be made available to physiotherapists in the area to accompany patients under their care.

Anne Dooley encouraged me to write this story in hopes of encouraging CAPA members across Canada to get involved in planning for future recreational facilities in their communities especially in areas without therapy pools or other suitable features for people with arthritis or other special needs.

So be aware and get involved on behalf of people in your community with arthritis and Good Luck! Don't hesitate to contact me at marlou@rogers.com if you have any questions or I can be of assistance to you.