

Dr Pat Camp introduction: Hello LungFIT listeners! On this episode I am delighted to welcome a guest host, Ashley Winter. Ashley will be talking to us today on the role of rehabilitation assistants in pulmonary rehab. I hope you enjoy this episode and I'll see you next time on LungFIT, bye for now.

Hello LungFIT listeners! My name is Ashley Winter & I am a research coordinator in Dr Camp's Pulmonary Rehabilitation Research Lab in Vancouver Canada. I am also a rehabilitation assistant who worked mainly in physiotherapy & today I wanted to talk about the benefits of having support staff, such as rehabilitation assistants, in your PR program.

In Canada, clinical therapy support workers are usually known as rehab assistants, and we work mainly in physical & occupational therapy as well as speech language pathology. Our role it definitely varies depending on the location in which we work - I know for instance in long term care & some transitional care units we can often work in rec therapy as well. Our job is really varied, and as I mentioned is often site specific.

The term rehab assistant can also be known as a therapy assistant, a rehabilitation tech, a physio assistant, a physical therapy aide, or even kinesiologist. There are obviously a lot more term that can be used to describe our role, but these are the ones that are typically used within North America.

Our rehabilitation assistance scope of practice: Here in Canada it can vary provincially, but overall we carry out the prescribed tasks of a rehabilitation programme that is always guided by a therapist, so we are unable to carry out any independent assessments or change the therapy that is prescribed, but often we relay information to the therapist about the client progress so that the therapist can use their clinical judgement on whether to progress or modify the treatment. Once this has been changed, we then pick up from there and keep going, working with the patient.

We work under direct supervision, particularly when working directly with patients, but we do have a lot of autonomy within our role, as long as we are sticking to our scope of practice. Our job is to really support the therapist in carrying out their prescribed duties, exercises & tasks so that the therapist can focus on providing primary care to other patients & also to ensure that each patient gets seen in therapy sessions. We provide a valuable contribution to both the therapist & to the patient.

I am going to include in the show notes two different references for the definition of rehab assistants, so one of them is going to be from the The Canadian Physiotherapy Alliance (<https://physiotherapy.ca/description-physiotherapist-assistants>) and the other one is an excellent resource that has been put together by the College of OTs of BC on how to supervise RAs & support staff ([https://cotbc.org/wp-content/uploads/COTBC\\_Practice-Guideline\\_Supervision2011\\_2.pdf](https://cotbc.org/wp-content/uploads/COTBC_Practice-Guideline_Supervision2011_2.pdf)).

In order to become an RA here in Canada we need to attend & complete a full time 2-year diploma program from a recognized educational institution, so this could be found in a technical school, a college or a university, or though obtaining a kinesiology degree. Placements, shadows & practicums are included in these 2 years in a variety of settings. So we get exposed to many different conditions, we get to work with different health care team members, and also just get to a lot of exposure working with different patient populations. Some of the RAs are grandfathered in, they usually come in from shorter programs, or perhaps they have been working in the role from a long time, they might have volunteer at some point and then got brought on as support staff, however this is becoming increasingly more and more rare.

We are utilized throughout acute care in most wards, but a huge component of the RA workload is leading & supporting outpatient groups. So Pulmonary Rehab is one such setting where you will find us!

What is the Role of an RA in PR?

There is a lot of different levels to our role, so we are going to talk about a few of them here.

- 1) Help obtain daily baseline & post therapy measures: When the patients arrive to the program, we take their heart rate, we get a Borg scale number & we also get their oxygen saturation levels. We check in with the patient as they arrive just to make sure they are feeling okay & also we go over COVID19 screening just to make sure that they are safe, and they are not feeling sick when they arrive to class.
- 2) Set up equipment & treatment area & cleaning: we often arrive a few minutes early help to set up the chairs for group led classes, we pull out the equipment that is needed for the class, we get the patient charts ready for the therapist & we make sure the environment is safe to receive patients. We also do on the spot cleaning for the equipment throughout the class & we make sure that all class participants wash their hands throughout the class.
- 3) Active monitoring & interaction of patients: In our PR program, we are also taking heart rate, Borg scale & oxygen sats throughout the class for each participant so that we are seeing how they respond to the exercise, that they are working within a safe zone, and that we are actually getting some benefits from the exercise program. We are also looking at the safety, so we are gauging how they are talking, how they are looking while they are exercising, just to make sure that everything is safe with them while they are in the class.
- 4) Fill out daily reports / stats: We assist with the recording of the measurements, we keep track of the exercise set & reps and which ones were completed, and we make any notes that the therapist can use later on for charting.
- 5) Assist with exercise guidance, instruction & set up: We often teach the patients on how to use the machines, we get them set up in any equipment, we teach & remind the patients on how to do the exercise correctly & we answer any questions they may have. We also relay info to the therapist so that the exercise can be adjusted if need be. We are often the eyes and ears in the class, so we speak a lot with the patients and we are really quite active with them so that we can be as hands on with them as well as being able to relay any information to the therapist during the class time, so it is really important!
- 6) Lead groups in warm up & cool down exercises & stretches: Group work is typically one of our strengths & we love leading classes! Assembling the group for pre & post workout exercises & stretches really creates a bonding experience for everybody in the class, it gives us a chance to see the class as a whole & allows us to convey info to everybody at once.
- 7) Relay really valuable information to the therapists: The therapists are usually really busy during the class with other patients, so we are active on the ground interacting with everybody. We are able to relay info to the therapist pretty quickly so that we can make adjustments or corrections in real time as needed, as guided by the therapist. So the situation comes up, we are right there

to deal with it, we can go and interrupt the therapist, tell them about the situation, and then we are able to make the change based on that information back from the therapist.

- 8) Conducting / assisting with shuttle walk tests, 6MWDT as long as it is always guided by a therapist. Sometimes we are able to do this independently, if we had training, but quite often we are there to just assist the therapist. If we are able to do this independently, this really frees up the therapist to conduct other assessments or duties within that time. So that's a really good use of time, being able to do this tests on our own.

What are the direct benefits of having an RA in a PR class? Well, there is many.

- 1) Cost saving - We are very economical & we can be used in lieu of a second therapist in terms of being the hand on within the program.
- 2) Active eyes & ears on the ground - because therapists are often doing other assessments or they are charting during the class, we are able to interact with the clients, we are able to get important info from them & get feedback that can be relayed to the therapist. Quite often patient get really comfortable speaking with us because we see them so much, and so sometimes we get pieces of information that the therapist may not get, and so we have the ability to take that information and share with the therapist so that we make sure that the patient is getting the appropriate treatment.
- 3) Extra set of hands on deck - we are there for safety monitoring & we can provide immediate help if a medical situation develops.
- 4) Build therapeutic relationships to patients for social support & relationship building. This is really key for a successful program. We can see the patients up to three times a week for eight to ten weeks, so that's a lot of time that we can spend getting to know them, they get to know us, and so it becomes a really good place of social support and community building.
- 5) Able to stand in for therapist if the therapist is conducting assessments. If the therapist is seeing a new patient, or perhaps they are doing some mid program assessments, we are there to make sure that all the patients get into therapy session, that everything is safe, that they feel good and that the active monitoring is happening.
- 6) Aid in collecting data & getting all the client stats in the class. Typically, before the class and after the class, it can be really chaotic. People are coming in, they are eager to keep going, they are chatting, and at the end of the class they are done, they want to put their coats on and they want to go. So, it can be quite hard to arrange everyone to get their stats. So, if that is to people, we are able to really offload that work and grab that information from the patients before they leave. So it is really important, because we need to record this, for their patient chart and also for our own stats.

We are curious if you have had a rehab assistant in your PR program - please let us know by sending us an email! We would also love to hear from you, we would love to hear about your experience of having a support staff worker such as a rehab assistant in your program. If you haven't given us any feedback yet or done a review we would also love for you to do that. So you can get in touch with us through our

podcast page, you can head over and write a review, we are really open to suggestions and feedback, and we would absolutely love to hear from you.

We thank you in advance! We look forward to seeing you in another show! Thanks again!