

Cancer Rehab and Survivors



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Cancer Survivors' Increase – Cancer Rehabilitation Programs Offer Program Opportunities

By Karen Gilden

Today, almost 4% of the US public are cancer survivors, not including individuals diagnosed with common (non-melanoma) skin cancers. On March 11, 2011 the Centers for Disease Control announced in Morbidity and Mortality Weekly (Cancer Survivors – United States, 2007) that the number of cancer survivors in the US had increased to 11.7 million within this decade, up from 9.8 million in 2001, and from 3 million in 1971.

The CDC study findings further reveal:

- 60% of the survivors are aged 65+;
- 54% of the survivors are female;
- 34% of the survivors received their diagnosis 10 or more years earlier;
- Survivorship varies by site of initial diagnosis—
 - Breast cancer survivors make up the largest survivor group (22%)
 - Prostate cancer survivors are the 2nd largest survivor group (19%), and
 - Colorectal cancer survivors follow (at 10%).

Many individuals have been cancer survivors for more than 25 years. Of the 11.7 million survivors identified through the CDC study, 1.1 million had lived for 25 years or longer from their date of initial diagnosis.

What are the implications for cancer programs? While cancer survivors have long been an active advocacy group, with vocal and successful organizations (e.g. the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS)) supporting their needs, a number of progressive community and academic programs are instituting or sponsoring survivorship **exercise and physical rehabilitation programs**. Called variously Cancer Rehabilitation, Good Health programs, or Restorative Cancer Medicine programs (among other program names), these activities offer cancer survivor's a "next step" after completing their treatment course and program's a point of differentiation from competitors.

Emerging evidence, highlighted by the National Cancer Institute during its 5th biennial Cancer Survivorship Research conference (June 2010), noted that physical activity and weight loss may favorably affect not only quality of life and symptom management, but also recurrence and survival. Dr. Julia Rowland, Director of the NCI Office of Cancer Survivorship, notes that while European oncologists have embraced cancer rehabilitation programs for survivors, the approach has yet to become mainstream practice in the US. In July 2010, The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) was instrumental in publishing **guidelines on exercise** for patients with breast, prostate, colon, gynecologic and hematologic cancers. The Guidelines are available in the July 2010 issue of *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*.

While numerous issues remain to be addressed, the American Cancer Society and the ACSM have developed a **certification program** for trainers who want to work with cancer patients and survivors. Also, the Lance Armstrong Foundation has partnered with the YMCA to help train fitness staff at YMCAs across the country to work with cancer survivors. Several community and academic cancer programs are adding cancer survivor fitness programs to their service portfolio as one approach to meeting this growing populations need, while simultaneously differentiating themselves from other cancer programs.