
Pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) is a:

‘comprehensive intervention based on a thorough patient assessment followed by patient-tailored therapies that include, but are not limited to, exercise training, education, and behavior change, designed to improve the physical and psychological condition of people with chronic respiratory disease and to promote the long-term adherence to health-enhancing behaviors’.1

There are clear recommendations that people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease should participate in PR programs.2

Over the past decade, the evidence base has grown considerably for PR in diseases other than chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, including bronchiectasis, interstitial lung disease, pulmonary arterial hypertension and dust-related respiratory diseases.2–6 To achieve the best outcomes for people with chronic respiratory diseases, and to ensure patient safety, it is essential that PR programs are delivered effectively and by using evidence-based principles. The Pulmonary Rehabilitation Toolkit was developed by a multidisciplinary team of PR clinicians and researchers, primarily physiotherapists, supported by the Lung Foundation Australia. The Pulmonary Rehabilitation Toolkit website provides information and resources in an online format that are invaluable for a range of health professionals and students, but primarily designed for physiotherapists and their patients.

The Toolkit website is structured to provide the framework for the core components of PR: ‘Getting Started’, ‘Patient Assessment’, ‘Exercise Training’, ‘Patient Education’ and ‘Program Evaluation’ (which includes patient re-assessment), as well as other pertinent information on the Practitioner Network and a National Program Map. The well-designed and easy to navigate Toolkit can be used by health professionals working in or preparing to establish PR programs throughout Australia, in metropolitan, rural and remote settings. It is also accessible internationally, with many elements of the Toolkit relevant to health professionals working in international PR programs. Additionally, the Toolkit website is a useful resource for physiotherapists learning about the core components and considerations of a PR program. The Toolkit website is well researched, and very comprehensive with in-depth content. It is an evidence-based resource and is supported by the recently published Australian and New Zealand Pulmonary Rehabilitation Guidelines.2

The first main section on the website is ‘Getting Started’. This section, as with the other sections, provides clinically useful information that is grouped into easily accessible subheadings. In the ‘Getting Started’ section, the reader is guided through an introduction to the Toolkit. There is also detailed information, including: which patients would benefit from a PR program; whether a clinician can offer a PR program (with respect to personnel, equipment requirements and appropriate staff-to-patient ratios for exercise training); and considerations such as program funding. A useful Toolkit summary and checklist, highlighting the key features and minimum requirements of a PR program, is available within this section. Importantly, the reader is advised that the information on the website is provided in accordance with ‘Health on the Net principles’:

the information on this website is designed to support, not replace, the relationship that exists between a patient or website visitor and his/her doctor or other health professional.

In the following sections, the clinician is provided with comprehensive information designed to guide him or her through a detailed PR ‘Patient Assessment’, including assessment of exercise capacity and quality of life, as well as providing specific eligibility and exclusion criteria. The section includes testing guidelines and standardised instructions for different measures of exercise capacity, as well as safety issues relating to exercise assessment. The clinician can then progress to the detailed, highly informative and evidence-based section on ‘Exercise Training’, which outlines key principles of exercise prescription (including intensity, frequency, duration, type, mode and progression) and considerations such as the length and location of the program and the use of supplemental oxygen. A staff and equipment checklist can be accessed within this section, which is useful to ascertain whether the necessary staffing and equipment requirements for a PR program are available. Examples of exercise training and detailed case studies are available to assist with exercise prescription, as are extensive reference lists within all sections, providing a comprehensive guide to additional reading materials if required.

The aims and objectives of patient education, for both the patient and family, as well as a range of education topics – including the role and correct use of medications, managing breathlessness and coping with chronic lung disease – are listed within the ‘Patient Education’ section. Guidance is provided about who may facilitate each session, as well as suggested content and available resources.

Performing a patient re-assessment at the completion of a PR program and collecting patient feedback are discussed within ‘Program Evaluation’. This section includes access to a sample patient satisfaction questionnaire that can be used on program completion to provide valuable insights for the health professional.

An important section within the Pulmonary Rehabilitation Toolkit is the ‘National Program Map’. This provides useful information to Australian clinicians and patients, through an interactive map, about the 300 registered PR programs and 80 Lungs in Action programs (community-based maintenance programs for individuals who have undergone pulmonary or heart failure rehabilitation) throughout Australia. The map and associated information provide details including the location, contact and delivery details of each program registered with Lung Foundation Australia. This section has the capability to improve the accessibility of PR to patients residing within Australia.

As with other websites, such as the Heart Online website (http://www.heartonline.org.au/), the Pulmonary Rehabilitation Toolkit is considered to be a ‘living document’ that can be updated as new evidence emerges. The currency of the Toolkit is evident through the comprehensive and up-to-date reference lists, with the most recent update occurring in March 2018.
The Pulmonary Rehabilitation Toolkit website is an excellent and visually appealing resource for physiotherapists and other health professionals working, or preparing to commence work, in PR programs, in metropolitan, rural and remote Australia, and internationally. The Toolkit is invaluable to physiotherapy students learning about PR. The Toolkit should also be considered an essential reference for health professionals working in this area, as it provides key information on the effective and safe delivery of all components of a PR program.


References